

WALKING GROUP FACILITATOR GUIDE

UNDERSTANDING PEER SUPPORT FACILITATION

PEER FACILITATOR TOOLS

PLANNING A GROUP

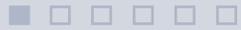
RUNNING A GROUP

WELLNESS TOOLS

RESOURCES & REFERENCES



UNDERSTANDING PEER SUPPORT FACILITATION



WHY WALKING GROUPS?

A sustained, consistent exercise group helps participants receive the full benefits of exercising⁶

Regular walking can reduce risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease⁴

When compared with resistance training, aerobic exercise like walking is better for helping to boost memory¹

Walking increases positive affect (feelings/emotions) and reduced negative affect⁵

A UC San Francisco study found that walking helped women over the age of 65 reduce mental decline²

Studies show that regular walking can be as effective as SSRIs in reducing depression³

Walking groups are fun!⁷

More on the benefits of walking

www.c3health.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/C3-report-on-walking-v-1-20120911.pdf

¹Brinke LF, et al. (2014) Aerobic exercise increases hippocampal volume in older women with probable mild cognitive impairment: a 6-month randomised controlled trial. *Brit J Sports Medicine*, 0: 1-8.

²Gabb, M.G. & Yaffe, K. (2001). The Benefits of Walking to Reduce Mental Decline. *Advanced Studies in Medicine*, 1(8): 324-6.

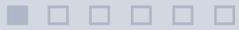
³Harvard Health Publications. (2013). *Understanding Depression*. Harvard Medical School.

⁴Hu, F.B. & Manson, J.E. (2003). Walking The Best Medicine for Diabetes? *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 163(12): 1397-8.

⁵Johansson, M., Hartig, T. & Staats, H. (2011). Psychological Benefits of Walking: Moderation by Company and Outdoor Environment. *Applied Psychology: Health & Well-being*, 3(3): 261-280.

⁶Strohle, A. (2009) Physical activity, exercise, depression and anxiety disorders. *J Neural Transmission*, 116: 777-784.

⁷You'll just have to trust us on that one.



WHY PEER SUPPORT?

Research shows peer support:

Increases hope, control and ability to effect changes in life¹

increases self-care, sense of community belonging and satisfaction among various life domains¹

Improves confidence, self-awareness, and self-esteem⁴

Decreases levels of depression and distressing and unusual experiences of reality¹

“Presence of support has repeatedly been linked to good long-term health outcomes based on demonstrations of better immune function, lower blood pressures, and reducing mortality (among others).”²

“Peer support can have multiple benefits, not only for the recipient and the giver of support, but also for organizations and systems within which the peer support is delivered.”³

Peer support is an incredible exchange of experiences, ideas and support. It is a two way street where facilitators and group members learn from each other!

¹Davidson, L., Bellamy, C., Guy, K. & Miller, R. (2012). Peer support among persons with severe mental illnesses: a review of evidence and experience. *World Psychiatry*, 11(2): 123-8.

²Hogan, B. E., Linden, W. & Najarian, B. (2001). Social Support Interventions Do They Work? *Clinical Psychology Review*, 22,;381-440.

³Woodhouse, A. (2013). Peer Support in Long Term Conditions: The Basics. Mental Health Foundations. www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/publications/peer_support_the_basics.pdf

⁴Swartz, E. C. (1999). Helping others helps oneself: response shift effects in peer support. *Social Science & Medicine*, 48(11): 1563-75.

EMPOWERING PERSPECTIVES

Use a Strengths Approach

Contrary to the dominant perspective in health care, the strengths approach does not focus on symptoms, problems or diagnoses. It amplifies the “WELL” in each person and our potential for human growth, healing and wholeness.

Worldview is Powerful

The illness worldview or perspective still dominates but we can change it to a Wellness Worldview by being intentional with our language.

Words we use can have many meanings and negative connotations. Be aware of the **power of language**. It can provide hope and empowerment but can also stigmatize and pathologize.

Labeling people by diagnosis or personality type can be problematic. Most people change from day to day, moment to moment and from situation to situation and don't fit into one category at all times. Try to understand the bigger picture and get to know different personal styles without limiting yourself or others.

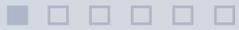
Become aware of limitations of different perspectives and how you can expand your worldview. Challenge yourself by holding multiple perspectives at once (even if they seem contradictory).

Along with shifting language and perspective, there are many different paths people find for building a hopeful and empowering perspective, like seeking out positive relationships, setting attainable

goals and celebrating those successes, finding successful role models, developing spirituality to enhance interconnection, expressing gratitude, and much more.

Whatever path you find, remember to breathe!

“If you treat an individual as he is, he will stay as he is, but if you treat him as if he were what he ought to be and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be.” ~**Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe**



INTENTIONAL PEER SUPPORT

Intentional Peer Support (IPS) is a method for creating personal and social change by focusing on what we want to create rather than giving up all of our valuable energy to something we don't want. It was developed by Shery Mead and she articulated the following principles of this approach:

IPS doesn't start with the assumption of a problem. Each of us pays attention to how we have learned to make sense of our experiences, then uses the relationship to create new ways of seeing, thinking, and doing.

IPS promotes a trauma-informed way of relating. Instead of asking "What's wrong?" we learn to ask "What happened?"

IPS examines our lives in the context of mutually accountable relationships and communities – looking beyond the mere notion of individual responsibility for change.

IPS relationships are viewed as partnerships that invite and inspire both parties to learn and grow, rather than as one person needing to 'help' another.

IPS encourages us to increasingly live and move towards what we want instead of focusing on what we need to stop or avoid doing.

Learn more at:
www.intentionalpeersupport.org/

"There's two of us involved in this, we're sharing this relationship.

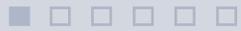
I want to learn and build a connection, let's take some time for reflection.

About what's happened to you, where you've come from your worldview.

I'll share back so we understand. A relationship where we both know where we stand.

Moving towards fostering hope. Rather than moving away from what's causing us not to cope."

~By Megan Powell
IPS Core Class Melbourne, Australia 2014

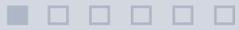


FACILITATING A WALKING GROUP MEANS

- Being early, prepared, organized, flexible and reliable.
- Knowing your participants and the walking route.
- Providing introductions and creating an inclusive environment.
- Multi-tasking: monitoring time while listening and being aware of participation.
- Adapting the walking route, speed and length to the group.
- Having available contact info for participants and a plan in case of an emergency.
- Providing up-to-date resources.
- Providing leadership, mentorship and mediation.
- Knowing how to use assertiveness and conflict mediation.
- Empowering participants and supporting a sense of equality.
- Being patient, tolerant, accepting and empathetic.
- Having awareness around language and different perspectives.
- Stimulating conversation and asking questions. Being aware of eye contact and body language.
- Sharing your own knowledge and facilitating the sharing and expression of participants.
- Being able to think on the spot and handle the unexpected.
- Having a sense of humour, charisma, passion, confidence and humility.

“The facilitator’s job is to support everyone to do their best thinking and practice. To do this, the facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding and cultivates shared responsibility. By supporting everyone to do their best thinking, a facilitator enables group members to search for inclusive solutions and build sustainable agreements”

~ Sam Kaner



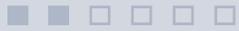
ROLE OF THE PEER FACILITATOR

1. Enhances the facilitator role by understanding and empathizing with group members.
2. Provides supportive listening and validation of other's experiences.
3. Accepts participants where they are at.
4. Only shares what they feel comfortable sharing and are mindful of what details may or may not be helpful.
5. Shares "what worked for them" rather than gives advice or tells others what to do.
6. Asks permission to give advice and makes sure the receiver knows they can take what resonates with them and leave the rest.
7. Creates an environment of comfort and ease to talk and share experiences.
8. Uses a comfort agreement and strengths-based approach.
9. Uses boundaries and self-care. Is self-aware and self-reflective.
10. Knows their strengths and is open and honest with the group.
11. Leads by example (not as the "boss"). Facilitators model healthy and respectful behaviours.
12. Observes the group atmosphere and ensures everyone feels included.
13. Makes sure group members know they can talk or be silent.
14. Finds out what the group wants and helps gain access to information, ideas, resources, support, etc.
15. Supports participants in reaching the goals of the group.
16. Reinforces that the group 'belongs' to the members.
17. Goes to the group for answers and input. Facilitators are not expected to have all the answers.
18. Embraces the Spirit of:
 - Autonomy (vs. Authority)
 - Evocation (vs. Education)
 - Collaboration (vs. Confrontation)

"When I give up trying to impress the group, I become very impressive. Let go in order to achieve. The wise facilitator speaks rarely and briefly, teaching more through being than doing." ~The Tao Te Ching



PEER FACILITATOR TOOLS



SELF-CARE

Self-Care is an important part of peer support. Knowing what internal and external resources you need and when to use them is invaluable. Knowing your inner strengths and who you can count on for support can carry people through the most and least difficult circumstances.

Self-Care is about balancing the various aspects of our lives; mental, physical, social, emotional, economic, etc. We do this by learning how to adjust to life's dynamic changes: ups, downs, back, forward, and sideways. With practice we become more resilient by minimizing the hurtful and maximizing the helpful and joyful. We also learn how to master our reactions to these changes.

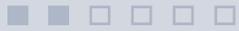
What do you do to create balance in your life? What wellness tools and supports do you use when life seems out of balance? How do you schedule self-care into the nooks and crannies of your life? How can you set a positive example for walking group participants?

Self-care enhances your own health, wellness, and happiness and you can share your tools and supports with others.

See Page 31 for Wellness Tools and tips on self-care.

“Self-care is asking yourself what you need, everyday, and making sure you receive it”
~**Caroline Jordan**

“Self-care is not selfish or self-indulgent. We cannot nurture others from a dry well. We need to take care of our own needs first, then we can give from our surplus, our abundance.” ~**Jennifer Louden**



BOUNDARIES

Create a safety bubble of emotional and physical space needed to honor your authentic self. Become resistant to external pressures that challenge your authentic self.

Create and communicate these boundaries based on your needs and preferences.

For example, in order to communicate with group members outside group, share the times you are available/not available. It is recommended that a separate email or phone number is used for calls and texts and if necessary reserve communications to group related information only.

Boundaries change and evolve as we learn more about ourselves and how we best work with others. It is okay to change your mind about your different boundaries along the

way. It helps to be honest and ask others to be patient with you and your process.

Make sure group members have supports outside of group. You can support others in obtaining additional supports such as; counsellors, social groups, social workers, doctors, etc. Make sure people know the crisis and warm lines for after hours and weekends.

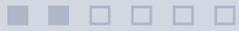
See Page 37 for Resources & References.

Helper Fatigue

Be aware of:

- Doing more than your boundaries or self-care allows.
- Doing most of the talking.
- Feeling bad if your advice is ignored.
- Not getting feedback.

“Boundaries are a declaration of the integrity of you. Boundaries reaffirm, day in and day out, “who you are” and what interactions and behaviors you deem acceptable and unacceptable to you. Boundaries can be seen as a set of guiding principles that help you govern the closeness or the distance you are comfortable with between yourself and others needed to maintain the integrity of you.” www.lead-her-ship.com



ASSERTIVENESS

Having good boundaries and self-care makes being assertive much easier. As you know and understand more about your needs you are better able to assert them.

Being assertive takes time and practice. We may not learn it overnight but as we continue to incorporate assertiveness skills into our interactions we see how effective they can be.

An unassertive “No” can be accompanied by defending explanations as a result of feeling guilty or not worthy of saying no. E.g. “I don’t think I can meet you tonight. I worked a lot today, I had people stay over all weekend, I have to feed my cat and cook and I’m not feeling well, etc.” An aggressive “No” is done with anger and force (sometimes the anger can be subtle and/or passive

aggressive). E.g. “No, leave me alone, you are so manipulative.” An assertive “No” provides simple explanation and is direct. E.g. “I cannot meet you tonight. I need some time alone.”

Try to notice voice tones and what they convey. For example, raising your voice at the end of a sentence interjects a note of uncertainty and implies asking rather than telling.

Try standing up straight and tall when you want to be assertive. Find the balance between unassertive and aggressive posture.

Unassertive eye contact involves very little and/or is directed to the ground. Aggressive eye contact never breaks. Assertive eye contact is direct and occurs about 50 % of the time.

Note: Body language changes depending on culture and upbringing. Be aware of different non-verbal communication styles. **For more on cross cultural communication check out:**

www.diversitycouncil.org/toolkit/Resources_TipSheet_NonverbalCrossCulturalCommunication.pdf

“Assertiveness is about openly communicating our feelings and establishing boundaries without guilt or fear.”

~Cloris Kylie

“Whenever we avoid conflict by keeping our feelings to ourselves, we do ourselves and others a disservice.” ~Doreen Virtue

If you say, “Yes,” when you want to say, “No,” you’ll resent what you agreed to do. **It’s honorable and authentic to say “No”.**

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES - OARS

Open Ended Question:

A question that elicits a more extensive response to a closed, “yes”/“no” answer, question.

- “Tell me more about _____?”
- “What do you think you will do?”
- “What are you already doing to be _____?”
- “When you responded the way you did, how did you feel about your reaction?”

Affirmation:

A statement that conveys and accentuates something positive, acknowledges a person’s strengths and efforts, and validates.

- “You have been working really hard, that’s amazing!”
- “You are really good at _____!”
- “With all the obstacles you have right now, it

is fantastic you could make it today.”

Reflection:

A statement or paraphrase that involves listening carefully, then making a reasonable guess about what the other person is saying (mirrors the explicit or implicit meaning).

- “That must have been hard for you?”
- “It sounds like _____” or “I get the sense that _____”
- “So on the one hand it _____ And, yet on the other hand _____” Is that right?

Summary:

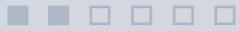
A reflection that draws together content from two or more prior statements.

- “Over the past few months you have been experiencing more anxiety and it’s starting

to affect your ability to have fun. You are frustrated and want to do something about it but don’t know what. Does that sound right?”

How can you apply OARS to your everyday interactions as well as in peer support groups?

“Ask open-ended questions. For example, if they tell you that they feel bad because their family doesn’t accept them because... , if you say “Does that make you feel bad?” you’ll get “yes”, but if you ask “How does that make you feel when your family has that attitude?” it opens up the dialogue. ~Carol Garcia



LISTENING

Can you tell when someone is truly listening or when they are rehearsing in their head what they are going to say next?

When others speak are you constantly comparing yourself to them, trying to figure out what the other person is really thinking, or are you daydreaming when something they say triggers a chain of associated thoughts and stories?

Are you quick to problem solve and offer advice before listening to the speaker's full story? Do you change the subject or go to lengths to be right or avoid being wrong? Perhaps you listen but placate the speaker by agreeing to their every claim.

These are listening roadblocks we all experience in some way or another. True

listening is a skill that can be developed with the help of mindful awareness.

Being aware of our thoughts as we listen can begin the self-awareness journey. Becoming mindful of our body's sensations (like the breath) can aid the slowing down of our thoughts.

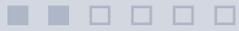
Slowing down and letting go of our thoughts may involve letting go of the importance we put on our response to the speaker. This frees up our energy and attention so that it can be invested in the speaker's story instead.

Paying attention to how our body responds to the narration keeps us in touch with ourselves in a way that we can still offer self-care and continue to listen.

Mindful listening requires the use of our many senses. Become aware of sounds and vocal inflections, notice body language, and feel empathetic emotions.

Mindful listening can be used in any situation from conversations with a friend over the phone to trauma counselling.

Exercise - With a partner, talk for 2 minutes (partner is silent), then switch and listen for 2 minutes. Be aware of your body's responses to the speaker's story.



CLARIFYING COMMUNICATION

The way we label our experiences affects accurate, clear communication. If we are unclear about our emotions and the causes, it can lead to misunderstanding, blaming and conflict.

Distinguish between what we feel and what we think we are.

Eg. I'm inadequate as a group member vs. I feel disappointed when I am unable to contribute to the group.

Distinguish between what we feel and how we think others react towards us.

Eg. I'm unimportant to the members of my group vs. I feel sad when no one asks me how I am.

Acknowledge the root of your feeling.

Our feelings usually result from:

1. How we choose to receive what others say and do.
2. Our particular needs and expectations in that moment.

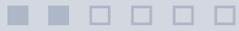
Express your needs and make a request of yourself or others to meet your needs.

Language that often stops communication can include: "you" statements, universal statements, "shoulding" on people, etc.

Being tough on the person but soft on the issues and invalidating feelings can also stop communication.

Try the following;

- "Do you mean ____?"
"Tell me what you think I am not understanding."
"I am struggling right now, how are you feeling?"
"When I said _____, what did you think I meant?"
"When you said _____, I interpreted that to mean _____. Is that correct?"
- Take turns speaking each for 2 minutes without interruption then have each person summarize what they heard. Clarify if what is heard is correct.
- Take a "time out" period of reflection, then reconnect.



UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

Conflict can be a very normal and necessary part of group dynamics, especially in the beginning stages when differences among opinions and experiences are being worked out and understood.

Knowing various triggering factors can help minimize conflict and aggression.

Ask yourself, am I or others feeling:
Hungry? Thirsty?
Tired?
Lonely or vulnerable?

Are there any environmental factors that may contribute to the aggression or conflict such as:

The weather	Time of month
Time of day	Time of year

What other circumstances in an individual's life will influence their ability to think clearly, stay calm, and problem solve? How can we cultivate tolerance and patience?

What needs may be hidden and are not being expressed?

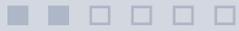
What language is being used that may stop the conversation and/or invalidate the individual's feelings and experiences?

“Conflict: A disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concerns.”

~**University of Wisconsin Human Resources**

“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't being said. The art of reading between the lines is a life long quest of the wise.”

~ **Shannon L. Alder**



NEGOTIATING CONFLICT & TRIGGERS

- Take a deep breath.
- Stay neutral. Try to see the bigger picture/greater perspective.
- Be kind to yourself.
- Refer to the comfort agreement.
- It's okay not to know what to do. Turn to the group for help.
- Use the word “and” to bring together conflicting arguments so that both points are validated. Be cautious of using “but”.
- If an individual is distressed have one facilitator talk to them, away from the group, while the other continues the session.
- Ask if the individual wants you to contact a friend, family or distress centre/mobile crisis team. Stay with

them until support arrives.

- Debrief the situation with the group. Have the group do a mindful moment to identify thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions. Allow the group to share their experiences.
- Summarize and reflect on the challenge and learning.

Stories and experiences involving anger, illness, death, violence, abuse, trauma, suicide, and psychosis can be scary and triggering. It is important to be aware of our own feelings and experiences that may arise while supporting others.

Honesty with ourselves and others, self-care, and mindfulness can help. Stay in touch with your own emotions and how they manifest in your body as you are being triggered. Use

self-care and self-compassionate techniques to tend to your discomfort.

See Page 32 for Self-Compassion Break.

Know your resources to support others in crisis and do some planning. Crisis can look very different for everyone. Ask what your supportee needs from you in these difficult times and respect confidentiality. Use the mobile crisis team if you are concerned for the individuals' physical or mental well-being.

See Page 37 for Resources & References and Page 28 for Confidentiality



PLANNING A GROUP



PLANNING A GROUP

STEP

STEP stands for Supports, Timing, Environment, and People. Each of those has a profound effect on the success and sustainability of a peer support group, whether that group is only meeting once, or that group is going to meet every day for years.

SUPPORTS

What supports will you need to lead effectively?

TIMING

What elements of timing are important before, during, and after the group?

ENVIRONMENT

How will your environment affect the walking journey? How will you ensure it's safe?

PEOPLE

How will you bring people to the walking group and evaluate whether you've met their needs?



STEP: SUPPORTS & TIMING

SUPPORTS

Having at least 2 facilitators is helpful when running a walking group. Not only does it help to share responsibilities but it ensures the group continues if someone falls ill or if a group member needs individual attention.

Once the group has started and you are creating group guidelines/comfort agreement, make sure you discuss supports. Have everybody discuss what they need for support and which supports are top priorities.

Do participants have the right shoes? Do you have a cellphone and a list of emergency numbers? Does the route have enough accessible washrooms? Etc...

TIMING

Time is important. A group that takes up too much time will lose its participants. A group that takes too little time might not get all of the health benefits out of walking.

Things Will Take Longer Than Expected. People will show up late, ask questions about things you don't expect, the weather may cause delay or cancellation, etc. Plan for it.

Consider the context of your participants' lives. Hold walking groups at times that make sense for the way people live. This will increase attendance and help lessen distractions.

Be Flexible and Consistent. It's okay to change things but help the group end on-

time and start on-time. Understand what can change and what can't.



STEP: ENVIRONMENT & PEOPLE

ENVIRONMENT

In a workshop or out for a walk the environment is full of factors that affect the group. For instance, if a sidewalk is too narrow or crowded and everybody needs to walk in a single-file line, there won't be much social interaction. In the winter months, challenges to walking can change day-by-day unless the group has an indoor location to walk in. Distance, weather, traffic, washrooms, food, safety, noise, and so much more can affect a walk.

Walk around. The best way to understand the dynamics of a walking route are to walk it. Do not walk it for the first time with your group participants.

Safety first. Consider safety in every sense

of the word. During a walking group, participants need to feel safe physically and mentally. Physical safety issues can be obvious while mental health safety issues can often be hidden and take time to uncover.

PEOPLE

The STEP process for establishing a peer support walking group is iterative and it begins with understanding the needs of participants and each step ends with assessing how you've met those needs and how you can improve the group design for the next iteration.

Peer walking leaders will have the opportunity to gather feedback from participants and continuously reassess and

adapt each STEP on the journey to building a successful group.

Engage people. Keeping people engaged and participating in a group is important. Identifying somebody to be the timekeeper, drink organizer or front and rear walker can help get people involved. What other roles can a walking group leader delegate?

Communicate. People encounter many barriers to attending groups, so communicate the details clearly and consistently. Try to overcome as many barriers as possible through a variety of communication methods to help connect you with current participants and potential new participants.



PLANNING A GROUP

STEP - Fill in each box with the needs or factors to consider. Revise as your group's needs change.

SUPPORTS	TIMING
ENVIRONMENT	PEOPLE



ADVERTISING & REMINDERS

A key skill for peer support group leaders is how to consistently communicate group details. Your invite for a group is important. Build it around **Supports, Timing, Environment, and People**.

Try to alleviate any uncertainties participants may have and prepare them for the walking group experience.

Having reminders posted at hosting organizations, sending out an email or communicating by phone the day before can be helpful to maintain group member participation.

Keep in mind that whether there are 20, 5 or just 1 person attending, the meaningful exchange and experience can be equally valuable.

Example Flyer:

Dear Walking Group Participant,

I'm looking forward to seeing you for the Walking Group this Sunday. Thanks for taking part to help build a healthier community! All of the details about Sunday are below:

What's happening: We will start by getting refreshments at Tim Horton's then our walk will take us around Christie Pits. During the walk we will stop to sit and chat in Christie Pits park.

What to bring: Comfortable shoes for walking, a water bottle, snack, and a change of clothes if preferred

Date & Time: 1 to 2 pm, Sunday, March 14th

Location: Meet at the Deer Park Library, 40 St Clair Ave.

Who is coming: Tony the walking group peer leader and anyone interested in getting out to walk and socialize with great people.

Contact: If you have any questions at all, or if you have accessibility or health needs you would like to discuss in advance, feel free to email me or call my cell: 416-555-5555



RUNNING A GROUP



CHECK-IN, CHECK-OUT & FEEDBACK

When beginning a group, create an opportunity for everybody to introduce themselves and begin the process of building social connections with the rest of the group.

A **check-in** at the beginning of each group session helps people to reconnect.

Ask people to share how they're feeling about today's group. Have they ever been in a walking group before? Are they nervous about their first time and meeting new people? This helps to get people talking and sharing their feelings and experiences.

It may also reveal that we are coming from different places, but we can all do something healthy together.

A **check-out** brings closure to the group session. This process aids the transition from the togetherness of the group to the separateness of members' individual lives.

Try to include next steps in the check-out especially if it is the final group of a series. Cultivate closure by reinforcing the availability of continuous supports in the community and celebrating change, growth, and evolution.

Before the group session ends it is helpful to get feedback from the participants on how the group is running. This can be done at the beginning at check-in or at the end.

Use this feedback to adjust and reiterate for the next walk.

When a Group Is Going Well

- Participants arrive on time and/or come early
- Group members are making connections and are in sync with each other
- Participants come back to the group
- Participants socialize after group
- Lots of interaction and chatter
- The group asks for more, more resources, sessions, time, etc.
- The group is self-directed and problem-solving for themselves, the facilitator takes a back seat
- The group accepts responsibility for maintaining the group and shares ideas
- Lots of humour and laughter
- Sense of togetherness, "we"-ness
- The group is respectful and participants are being responsive to each other



COMFORT AGREEMENT

It's good to all be on the same page especially when it comes to comfort in a group. A comfort agreement can help to establish boundaries for all group members including facilitators.

Have the group come up with their own comfort guidelines. Include things like general housekeeping (ie. location of washrooms, etc.) and self-care, confidentiality, sharing of contact information, facilitator and group member roles, and treating others with unconditional positive regard and respect for diversity.

Talk About Talking

Some people may want to talk and others might not. Help people see that it's okay to do both. Ask the group to try and explore out of their default mode. Share the talking space and STEP UP STEP BACK.

Safety

Discuss any safety concerns that might arise. Know your supports.

Conflict

Have a conversation about conflict and what the group will do if this occurs. If conflict arises remember to refer to the comfort agreement.

Unconditional Positive Regard

Accept each individual as valuable in his or her own right. Trust in the ability of each individual to discover their own solutions to their situation. Recognize individual strengths and efforts to change and focus on the individual, not on the behaviour. Provide feedback and comments that focus on observable situations rather than judgments.



CONFIDENTIALITY

It is good practice to keep any information shared as a peer supporter confidential, unless permission is granted to share.

When to break confidentiality?

It is ethically responsible to break confidentiality in the following circumstances:

If an individual is 16 years of age and under and is at risk of being harmed, call:

Children's Aid Society
416-924-4640 (24/7)
www.torontocas.ca

If there is a serious possibility that an individual may harm themselves or others, call:

Gerstein Mobile Crisis Team
416-929-5200 (24/7)
www.gersteincentre.org

Note: It is up to you to discern the seriousness of the situation. Prior to breaking confidentiality, have a conversation about the sensitive circumstance and inform the individual of any actions you plan to take. Make sure you have exhausted all efforts to maintain their autonomy.



LIABILITY & FLOATS

Sometimes the organization you are doing a walking group for will have its own liability waiver for you to have participants sign. This is to protect the organization and yourself from being responsible if anything should happen to a group member.

If you are running a group on your own the liability waiver is often not necessary. Since peer leaders are not medical professionals and do not give direct advice they should not be liable.

If there is funding through your organization to provide drinks and/or snacks for group participants, you will have the responsibility of managing a float.

FLOAT TIPS

- Keep track of the date and amount of float \$ you are given.
- Secure a separate place for float money, tokens and receipts.
- Keep track of weekly spending in a spreadsheet.
- Plan ahead - submit receipts early to ensure you receive your next float on time.



GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK!

Leading a peer support walking group can be challenging at times so be kind to yourself. Make sure you do something nice for yourself and practice good self-care.

Connect with other peer leaders to share experiences and get support. Get together and do something fun!



WELLNESS TOOLS



SELF-COMPASSION BREAK

When you notice that you're under stress, see if you can find the stress in your body. Where do you feel it the most? Make contact with the stress as it arises in your body.

Now, say to yourself:

1. **This is a moment of suffering**

That's mindfulness.

Other options include:

- This hurts.
- Ouch
- This is stress

2. **Suffering is a part of life**

That's common humanity.

Other options include:

- Other people feel this way
- I'm not alone
- We all struggle in our lives

Now, put your hands over your heart, or wherever it feels comforting, and feel the warmth and gentle touch of your hands.

Say to yourself:

3. **May I be kind to myself**

You can also ask yourself, "What do I need to hear right now?"

Is there a phrase that speaks to you in your particular situation, such as:

- May I give myself the compassion that I need
- May I accept myself as I am
- May I learn to accept myself as I am
- May I forgive myself.
- May I be strong.
- May I be safe
- May I be peaceful
- May we all be kind
- May we live in peace



SELF-TALK

How to Switch From Negative to Positive Self-Talk? First tune into your negative self-talk. Most of us experience negative self-talk at some point in our lives. Some estimates even indicate that 70-80% of our daily thoughts are negative. Unfortunately these negative thoughts have a large impact on our health, happiness and success.

Negative Self-Talk can:

- Make us less healthy. We may get sick more often and take longer to recover.
- Make it more difficult to succeed at a job, school, sports, etc.
- Lower our quality of life and relationships.
- Make it harder to start new relationships and maintain old ones.

So Where Do These Thoughts Come From? Negative thoughts can come from a combination of experiences such as criticism from others, mental and emotional

abuse, past failures and disappointments, betrayals, trauma, physical and sexual abuse, or comparing ourselves to others E.g. co-workers, parents, peers, celebrities, models, or saints. This can make us feel like we don't measure up or aren't enough.

The good news is that as soon as we are aware of our negative self-talk and have the intention to change it, a lot of the work is already done.

Tune into your own “frequency” of negative self-talk:

- Do you call yourself names? (E.g. Stupid, geek, loser)
- Do you put yourself down? (E.g. I'll never get it, I'm always going to mess up)
- Do you second-guess others' feelings towards you? (E.g. People just pretend to like me)
- Do you predict negative outcomes? (E.g. I'm going to fail my test and mess up my

future)

- Do you awfulize? (E.g. I spilled my coffee, my life sucks)
- Do you catastrophize? (E.g. I lost my phone, I won't be able to call anyone ever again, this is the worst day ever)
- Do you generalize that if one experience was bad than all experiences must be bad? (E.g. My first girlfriend cheated on me, all girls are the same)
- Do you think in extremes/All-or-Nothing? (E.g. If this paper isn't perfect then it's a complete failure)
- Do you automatically assume that others think negatively about you? (E.g. He thinks I'm stupid, he must hate me)

Thought Stopping. Imagine that thoughts are connected to you by cords and when you think of a particular thought the cord gets stronger and the thought gets bigger. In order to stop a particular thought you must stop “feeding” it and cut it off.



SELF-TALK

We can do this by thought stopping. Next time you have an unwanted thought, picture yourself cutting the cord to the thought. You can also visualize a stop sign or internally say STOP.

“Like food is to the body, self-talk is to the mind. Don’t let any junk thoughts repeat in your head.” ~ Maddy Malhotra

Thought Swapping. Once you have noticed and stopped a thought, there are several things you can do. Use whichever combination of techniques works best for you.

Substitute the negative thought for the opposite positive thought (E.g. “I can’t do this” becomes “I can do this!”)

If you are thinking you will never succeed at something, think about a time when you did succeed at something in the past. Then tell yourself: “I succeeded at (past success) so I can certainly succeed at this now”.

Substitute negative thoughts with positive affirmations and quotes (E.g. “I believe in my ability to think positively and be happy.”; “I have the power to change myself.”)

“Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you’ll start having positive results.” ~ Willie Nelson

Validity Testing. Question and challenge the validity of your negative thoughts. You can do this in your head or you can write it out in a thought record.

1. investigate the circumstances around the thought. Check if you are hungry or tired. Remember you are not alone and try to relate your thought to one of the common “cognitive distortions”.
2. List the evidence for and against the negative thought, then try to create a more balanced thought and perspective.

Goal-Directed Thinking.
Ask yourself:

- Will this way of thinking help me to reach my goals?
- What can I do to help solve this challenge?
- Is there something I can learn from this situation that will help me in the future?

Engage Yourself.

Do a mindful moment meditation. Drop into your body, focus on your breath. Become mindful in your current activity or start a new one (E.g. Listen to music, paint, do a sensory walk, play a game or sport, or write a gratitude list). Hang out with people who think positively and try to stay away from negative environments.

At first, you might only remember to pay attention and use the thought changing techniques once in a while. Don’t fret, it gets easier. Hang in there and you will start to see your world change!



SLEEP HYGIENE

If you struggle with getting a full night's sleep try a combination of the following:

- Get up at the same time every day, even on weekends.
- Get enough sunlight during the day. This will help you sleep when it's dark.
- Cut down or stop caffeine altogether (E.g. coffee, tea, power drinks, chocolate).
- Especially avoid it past 4:00pm.
- Do some physical exercise every day. Avoid intense exercise after 6:00pm.
- Eat healthy food. Avoid heavy meals past 8:00pm.
- Take care of yourself. Avoid over-the-counter drugs and get regular medical check-ups.
- Try not to take naps during the day. It will prevent you from being tired later at night.
- Try to stop nicotine intake 4 hours before bed.
- Nicotine has stimulant properties and may keep you awake. Also, your body may crave it during the night and wake you up to get a fix.
- Try to stop drinking alcohol 2 hours before bed. Alcohol may initially help you fall asleep but your sleep will not be sufficiently restful. Alcohol reduces restorative REM sleep, the sleep you need to process events from the day. It also suppresses breathing thereby decreasing oxygen to the brain and kicking you out of restful sleep numerous times a night. It is common that people wake up throughout the night from dehydration as well.
- Make your sleep environment comfortable (but not too warm), dark, and quiet.
- Avoid screen time and stimulating activities 1-2 hours before bed.
- Have a light carbohydrate snack before bed. This helps stimulate serotonin and melatonin, the comfort chemicals that help you sleep.
- Only crawl into bed if you feel tired. Train your mind to sleep when in bed.

“Sleep is the golden chain that binds health and our bodies together” ~Thomas Dekker



TOOLS FOR TRIGGERS

THOUGHTS

- Remember the positive things about using healthy wellness tools.
- Be aware of negative self-talk and try to shift to more positive thoughts.
- Tell yourself that nothing is forever and it will pass.
- Remind yourself that you are in charge of whatever decisions you make.
- Remember the negative things about harmful coping strategies.
- Think about your future goals and how you can achieve them.
- Make a commitment to yourself to fulfill a goal.
- Distract yourself.
- Think of things you are grateful for.
- Tell yourself that you are doing well.

FEELINGS

- Ask yourself what you're feeling.
- Remind yourself: unpleasant feelings are difficult but they are normal.
- Give yourself permission to feel emotions and express them.
- Ask for support. Talk to someone about your feelings.
- Find ways to express yourself creatively.
- Keep a journal. Write about your experiences.
- Attend a support group.
- Offer yourself compassion and remind yourself you are not alone.
- Take time to soothe and care for yourself.
- Praise yourself for your hard work.

ACTIONS

- Try to avoid people, places or things that are high risk or trigger cravings or thoughts about unhealthy behaviours.
- Take someone you trust with you when facing a risky situation/place.
- Leave situations that seem risky or limit how long you stay.
- Plan ahead for potentially difficult situations or obstacles.
- Go for a walk, exercise or do something physical you enjoy.
- Go on the internet, watch tv or read something inspiring.
- Do volunteer work.
- Go outside and get some fresh air.
- Reward yourself with delicious food, buy something new.
- Go out with friends.



RESOURCES & REFERENCES



RESOURCES & REFERENCES

PEER SUPPORT WALKING GROUPS

Canadian Mental Health Association

www.moodwalks.ca

Minding Our Bodies

www.mindingourbodies.ca/program_directory/cmha_toronto_walking_group

Physical Activity for Consumer/Survivors

www.accentonability.org/phacs

Unison Health and Community Services

www.unisonhcs.org/health-promotion/healthy-lifestyles

Walking for Mental Health

416 236-7234

“Working on Wellness” in High Park

recoveringnancy@gmail.com

WALKING GROUP TRAINING MANUALS

www.diabetesandmentalhealth.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/DMHPS-Trainer-Guide.pdf

www.documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents.ottawa.ca/files/documents/walk_toolkit_en.pdf

www.moodwalks.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Mood-Walks-Information-for-Mental-Health-Agencies.pdf

www.moodwalks.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Mood-Walks-Program-Manual-Web.pdf

www7.mississauga.ca/Departments/Rec/community-development/get-active/pdf/Walk-Leader-Handbook.pdf

PEER WELLNESS TRAININGS

Crisis and Suicide Intervention

www.gersteincentre.org/asist-mental-health-awareness-and-crisis-intervention

Gaining Autonomy with Medication

www.rrasmq.com/gam_guide.php

Mental Health First Aid

Mental Health Commission of Canada
www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca

Pathways To Recovery

www.krasmancentre.com/cultureofrecovery/?page_id=24

Peer Zone

www.peerzone.info

Wellness Recovery Action Plan

WRAP for Families, Youth, Hearing Voices, Fitness, Diabetes, Music and more.
www.wrapclub.com
www.wraptoronto.com



RESOURCES & REFERENCES

CRISIS

Gerstein Centre Crisis Line & Mobile Team
416-929-5200

Integrated Community Mental Health Crisis Response Program (Etobicoke & North York) 416-498-0043

Mobile Crisis Program (Scarborough & East York) 416-289-2434

St. Elizabeth Mobile Crisis (North York & Etobicoke): 416-498-0043

HELPLINES / WARMLINES

Distress Centres of Toronto
416-408-HELP

Drug and Alcohol Helpline
1-800-565-8603

Krasman Centre

1-888-777-0979 (24hrs)
www.krasmancentre.com

Mental Health Helpline
1-866-531-2600

Ontario Problem Gambling Helpline
1-800-230-3505

Progress Place
416-960-WARM (8pm-12am)
www.warmline.ca

REFERENCES

Assertiveness
Effective Communication Speaking Up
Assertively Linda D Tillman
www.speakupforyourself.com

Clarifying Communication
www.cnvc.org

Spencer Brennan. (2010).
www.psychologytoday.com/blog/

communication-success/201205/are-you-poor-communicator-how-improve

Communication Techniques - OARS
Sobell & Sobell. (2008). Motivational Interviewing Strategies and Techniques: Rationales and Examples
www.nova.edu/gsc/forms/mi_rationale_techniques.pdf

Listening
McKay, Davis & Fanning,
Messages: The communication skills book

Self-Compassion Break
Kristin Neff
www.centerformsc.org/meditations

Sleep Hygiene
Dr. Colin M. Shapiro & Dr. Jonathan A.E. Fleming

Strengths Based Approach / Self-Talk
Pathways to Recovery: A Strengths Recovery Workbook Ridgway et al. (2002)

WALKING GROUP FACILITATOR GUIDE

www.selfhelp.on.ca
www.twitter.com/SelfHelpRC
www.facebook.com/SelfHelpRC