

# SANE

FACTSHEET

## PEER SUPPORT

### QUICK FACTS

- Peer support involves people or groups supporting one another **based on shared experiences of mental health challenges**.
- Intentionally and safely sharing stories can **promote mental health recovery** and increase hope and connection.
- Professional Peer Support Workers are trained to use their experience of mental health issues or caring for someone to support others safely.
- Peer support has **benefits for quality of life** and can increase skills and confidence in managing mental health issues.

### WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT?

Peer support is when people give or receive support based on shared experiences of mental health concerns. Peer support relationships are different from traditional clinician-patient relationships and are not based on medical models. Instead, peer support provides mental health benefits through empathy, acceptance, and skill-sharing that comes from dealing with similar lived experiences.

### BENEFITS OF PEER SUPPORT

There is limited evidence that peer support reduces mental health symptoms. However, it can still be an important tool in recovery. Receiving peer support has a range of possible benefits for people with mental health issues, including (1-3):

- Increased knowledge, skills, and confidence to manage mental health and treatment
- Improved quality of life and emotional resilience
- Feelings of hope and empowerment
- Increased sense of connection and less loneliness
- Less self-stigma around mental health
- Greater self-reported recovery
- Fewer hospital admissions

- Reduced substance use issues.

The person giving peer support can also be helped by the process. People providing peer support describe:

- Greater self-esteem through making a positive impact on others
- More feelings of equality in relationships
- Gaining helpful knowledge from peers
- Social approval and connectedness with others.

## **WHAT DOES PEER SUPPORT INVOLVE?**

A peer support relationship can be one person supporting others emotionally, socially, or through their shared lived experience. It can also be mutual, where each person involved is giving and receiving support.

Peer support is often provided professionally in mental health services. However, a lot of peer support happens informally, between people who share similar experiences and connect in person or online.

Peer support does not replace other mental health support from psychologists, counsellors, or psychiatrists. However, it is often used alongside other mental health services, empowering people to lead fulfilling lives and manage mental health challenges.

People do not need to share the same mental health diagnosis for peer support to work. Instead, the benefits come from having faced similar (but not necessarily the same) challenges.

## **TYPES OF PEER SUPPORT**

Peer support can be delivered in a range of ways, in person, over the phone, or online. Peer support can be one, or a combination, of the two categories:

### **Informal peer support**

Informal peer support is a mutual relationship between people who have similar experiences. There are not necessarily any guidelines or trained group facilitators, and there may be no mental health services involved. This could take place on social media groups, common interest meet-ups, blogs or Forums.

### **Professional peer support**

A professional Peer Support Worker will have training in how to use their mental health experience intentionally to support others safely, in groups or one-to-one. They may have additional training in group facilitation, mental health support, and assisting people who've been through trauma.

Peer Support Workers aim to support people wherever they are in their recovery, and to focus on a person's strengths.

## FIND OUT MORE

To explore if peer support will be helpful, think about what would suit you best. You may feel more comfortable depending on whether you are meeting one-to-one or in a group, and whether support is face-to-face or online.

It is also important to think about what you feel comfortable sharing and whether hearing other peoples' experiences will be helpful right now, or if it might be upsetting. Peer support will not suit everyone all the time, and that is normal.

When searching for peer support, keep your safety in mind. Look for groups, services, and communities that:

- Are run by trustworthy organisations or charities
- Are facilitated by group leaders or Peer Support Workers who have support and training
- Have guidelines to make sure everyone is safe
- Keep your information private.

For help finding the right support for you, contact a trusted GP, mental health professional, or helpline to talk through options.

**Peer support can be an important part of mental health recovery, increasing hope, quality of life, and empowering people to manage their mental health.**

**To discover more ways of connecting with others with shared experience, explore SANE's range of peer support services, for anyone with mental health challenges or concerned about someone.**

[LEARN MORE](#)

## RESOURCES

- [What is peer work?](#) - video by Peer Work Hub
- [SANE Forums Lived Experience Community](#)
- [SANE Forums Family, Friends & carers Community](#)
- [Online peer communities create hope everyday](#) – Blog

## REFERENCES

1. Shalaby RAH, Agyapong, VIO. Peer Support in mental health: literature review. JMIR Ment Health 2020 Jun; 7(6).
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3. Repper J, Carter T. A review of the literature on peer support in mental health services. J Ment Health 2011 Aug; 20(4): 392-411.