

Peer Support Group Start-Up Guide

For Trans, Gender Diverse, and Two-Spirit Adults



Developed by Peers
at Trans Care BC

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TRANS CARE BC
Provincial Health Services Authority

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Acknowledgement

This guide was developed by Trans Care BC to provide guidance to peer support groups for trans, gender diverse, and Two-Spirit people. The intention of this start-up guide is to offer information, resources, and a framework that peer group leaders and facilitators can use and adapt in order to start a peer support group, or to build on and strengthen an existing group.

We encourage readers to share this document with facilitators or group leaders who may benefit from this resource.

If you would like to post this resource to your website or to share it publicly, we ask that you contact [Trans Care BC](#) first.

We would like to acknowledge Kiel Murray for all of their work on developing this resource. The time, energy, and heart they contributed to this document has made this invaluable resource possible.



About Us: Trans Care BC



Trans Care BC is a provincial program in BC working to enhance and coordinate trans health services and supports across the province, bringing gender-affirming care closer to home wherever possible.

We work to make sure people have the information they need to access gender-affirming health care and supports.

Our services support those who identify as trans, gender diverse, Two-Spirit, and their families, friends and loved ones as well as service providers.

The Trans Care BC Peer and Community Supports team provides support, mentorship, and resources to peer-led initiatives across the province.

For more information, visit
www.transcarebc.ca/care-support



For more information about this guide or to contact Trans Care BC, please contact the team below:

Care Coordination Team for inquiries or support related to trans health services and resources available in BC:

transcareteam@phsa.ca or call **Toll-free (BC): 1-866-999-1514**

For general inquiries:
Transcarebc@phsa.ca

Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

What is Peer Support?

Peer support is a term that refers to the emotional and practical support between two people who share a common experience. Peer support is grounded in using personal experiences, and the knowledge and familiarity that comes from those experiences, to support others who may be navigating similar or closely-related circumstances. Historically, peer support has been a therapeutic approach utilized in trans, gender diverse, and Two-Spirit communities as a way of promoting positive health and wellness outcomes.

Peer support groups can help members find community and connections, strengthen personal skills around health literacy, resiliency and self-care, increase their access to resources and services, and have the beneficial experience of learning through other peoples' experiences while sharing about their own.

What is a Peer Support Group?

Although peer support groups can take a lot of different forms, they are typically a group of two or more people with similar lived experiences who come together to support each other, or their community in some way. Peer support groups can run in a variety of ways. A group may be education focused, such as a peer group focused on sexual health education, or may be rooted in socializing and connecting more informally, such as a drop-in group . Group formats are typically guided by the members of the group as they know what will work best for their own needs. There is no particular way that a peer support group “should” function and groups may find it helpful to operate with flexibility and adaptability, based on the ever-changing needs of the group members.

Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

Key Principles of Peer Support



Sharing Equal Status

People in a peer-led group have come together because they share a common experience, so all members should be treated equitably and with respect. Everyone's input should be valued, and all members share a responsibility to keep the group going.

Giving and Receiving

In a peer-led group, each individual receives support and also offers it to other people. It is assumed that everyone has a gift to offer while being in the space. This type of give-and-take participation enhances confidence and self-esteem by allowing each person to support others at the same time that they are accepting support.

Knowing from Experience

People are experts on their own lives. Peer support recognizes and values personal knowledge, emotional insights, and resilient and resourceful skills that people can gain from sharing their experiences, and from hearing the stories of other people.

Respecting Accessibility Needs

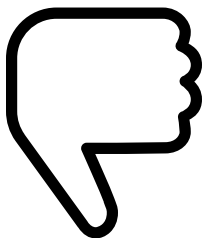
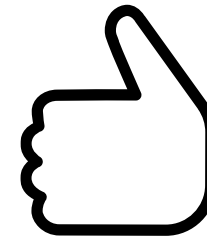
Peer-led groups should be low, or as barrier-free as possible. This allows for groups to be accessible to the greatest number of people, and especially those who may already be navigating barriers to accessing support. It can be helpful to engage peer group members in a discussion about how everyone can work together to make the group, and meeting space, as accessible as possible. This guide includes an accessibility questionnaire in Appendix B to help support facilitators and organizers in assessing how accessible their group is.

Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

What a Peer Support Group Does

- Validates people's experiences
- Reduces isolation
- Provides opportunities to give and receive support
- Fosters connections and a social support network



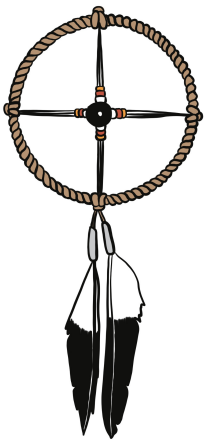
What a Peer Support Group Doesn't Do

- Advise others on how to address their problems. Everyone deserves the respect and agency to be given the space to find their own path.
- Replace other forms of support such as therapy, treatment from a doctor or psychiatrist, or medications.
- Support everyone with every type of challenge - peer support groups are focused on a specific shared experience.

Section 1:

INTRODUCTION

A Note on Language



This manual uses the words **trans**, **gender diverse**, and **Two-Spirit** throughout and definitions are included below. Further definitions of terms used in this resource can be found in Appendix A at the end of the booklet.

Trans: An umbrella term that describes a wide range of people whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth. Including but not limited to, trans, gender diverse, and non-binary identities.

Gender Diverse: Gender roles and/or gender expression that do not match social and cultural expectations, including non-binary, gender non-conforming and gender variant.

Two-Spirit (2 Spirit, 2-Spirit or 2S): The term “Two-Spirit” was created by a group of LGBTQ Indigenous community members in 1990 at the third annual Inter-tribal Native American, First Nations, Gay and Lesbian American Conference held in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It is a term currently used within some Indigenous communities to encompass sexual, gender, cultural and spiritual identity.

Two-Spirit reflects complex Indigenous views of gender roles and the long history of sexual and gender diversity in many Indigenous communities across Turtle Island (typically known as Canada and the United States). Individual terms and roles for Two-Spirit people are specific to each community. The term Two-Spirit is only to be used for Indigenous people, due to the cultural and spiritual context. That being said, not all Indigenous people who hold diverse sexual and gender identities consider themselves to be Two-Spirit.

Section 2:

Considerations Before Starting a Group

Research

Find out what supports currently exist in your area by searching online, asking friends and peers, and checking social media, bulletin boards, and other areas where this information may be shared.

Get in touch with any existing peer support groups, or attend their meeting to experience the group and gain insights into what needs are already being met in the community.

Talk to peers who have experience with support groups as group members and/or facilitators, and ask them to share their insights with you. Host a community consultation opportunity or launch a peer support group survey to learn more about your communities' needs.

Planning

There is much to consider and reflect upon prior to starting a peer support group. In order for the group to meet the needs of the community members who will attend, it is important that the group functions in a way that supports the diverse needs of group members and seeks to meet group members' peer support needs from the start of the group. A great step to take when planning for a peer group is to form a planning committee to work together to start the group.

Forming a Planning Committee

A planning committee creates an opportunity where a group of people can work together to collectively design a group, while dividing the planning duties and various roles required. The planning committee can determine what the biggest priorities are for planning and can coordinate an action plan for how to address these priorities. When considering who to invite to the planning committee, it might be helpful to include people with experience running, supporting, or facilitating peer support groups, and especially people with beliefs and peer approaches that fit into an anti-oppressive value set.

Section 2:

Considerations Before Starting a Group

**Here are some
logistic topics
and questions
for the
planning
committee to
consider**

- What is the goal of the planning committee?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the planning committee?
- What do we hope to achieve by X date
- What resources/supports do we currently have? (for example: a meeting space, tables/chairs, facilitator(s), etc.)
- What resources/supports do we need?

**Here are some
broader topics
for the
planning
committee to
consider**

- What does “peer support” mean to the group?
- What is the goal of the group? For example: support group? Social/networking? Activism?
- How will the group be structured? How does the structure support the goals of the group?
- Who will facilitate the group? Will it be co-facilitated?
- Are there Group Agreements to help create safety?
- What is required of the participants who attend the group?
- Are there certain behaviors or actions that would result in a participant being unable to attend the group, either temporarily or indefinitely? If so, what are these limitations?
- Does the group have or need an emergency plan?
- How will the group be evaluated, to ensure the group goals are being met?

Section 2:

Considerations Before Starting a Group

Logistic Considerations

As important as the structure and goals of the meeting are, it is also important to sort out the less abstract day-to-day considerations of running a peer support group which fall broadly under the heading of logistics.

Location

Location is a very important consideration. Some of the things that might be worth reflecting on and discussing in the planning committee are:

- Is the location sufficiently private, but also easy for people to locate to attend the meetings?
- Is the location of the meeting easily accessible by public transit?
- Is the location accessible? Is there a gender inclusive, single stall washroom available for the meeting? Is it accessible? Does the washroom include enough space for a scooter, wheelchair, or other mobility aid?
- Is the location in an area where people in community feel comfortable meeting?
- Are there any options for storing belongings securely at this location? If you are providing food/drinks regularly it can be helpful to have a secure place to leave things such as a kettle, a coffee machine, plates and serving utensils, and other resources for the group.

Accessibility

Accessibility is a term that refers to how safely and effectively the space, building, and meeting can be accessed by people with disabilities or accessibility needs. Accessibility may seem like a daunting topic if you are new to considering the myriad of ways that society is inaccessible for people with disabilities, but it is an important consideration for supporting those who experience intersecting barriers.

There is an accessibility guide in Appendix B which can help your group become more familiar with some types of the limitations and sensitivities to consider, perform an assessment of the accessibility of your potential space, and improve accessibility in less than ideal circumstances.

Section 2:

Considerations Before Starting a Group

Cost

Peer support groups usually do not require a cost to participate. This is very important for reducing barriers and increasing accessibility. If the group does not have any dedicated funding, it may be necessary to host a fundraiser in order to cover expenses such as snacks, bus tickets, and meeting room rental fees, if they apply. Some peer support groups find it helpful to partner with a local non-profit organization or other peer group who can offer resource support. Discuss with your group members if they would like to apply for funding grants or seek out organizational partnerships, and how these funds will be managed within the group. It may be beneficial to have a dedicated treasurer role, or someone who is experienced in maintaining a budget and tracking expenses.

Time

Planning for the group to happen during a time when all group members can attend may be a difficult task. It can be a helpful planning measure to first consult with potential group members to determine the majority availability and the preferred time to hold the meeting. It might also be helpful to rotate meeting dates/times if group members are not commonly available to meet at the same time. Here are some questions to delve into with your planning committee when considering what time the meeting will run:

- Who are the intended participants of the group, and are there any unifying scheduling considerations to explore? For example, a group aimed at parents/caregivers may decide to meet on a Saturday or Sunday, whereas a youth group may decide to meet when school ends for the day.
- Consider the area where the meeting is being held and whether there are times of day which are more or less safe for meeting participants to be commuting to and from the area.
- When choosing a location, identify if there any potential accessibility issues and note if there are any scheduling barriers that would prevent your group from accessing the space at certain times of the day.

When choosing a location, consider finding a community location that is accessible and open to everyone, such as a rec centre or library. Some group members may not be comfortable in non-neutral settings such as partisan or religious spaces.

Section 2:

Considerations Before Starting a Group

Privacy

A fulsome discussion about privacy and confidentiality is important for any group because for many members, privacy is intrinsically connected with safety. Not everyone is out or is in a position where it is safe for them to be. Ensuring there is a commitment within the group to maintain and respect privacy and confidentiality, and a supportive approach to talking about it with the entire group, will help create a stronger sense of safety for everyone attending the group.

Confidentiality

Creating a space where people can feel safe sharing openly and honestly requires that there is confidentiality among members in the room. A group agreement that explicitly states the importance of confidentiality as a pivotal guideline of the space can be a helpful reminder for all group members.

It could also be beneficial to tell group members that facilitators will not approach or acknowledge them outside of meetings unless they initiate that contact. There should also be consideration given to what happens in the group if confidentiality or privacy is breached, and the outcomes of this should be communicated clearly to group members in advance.



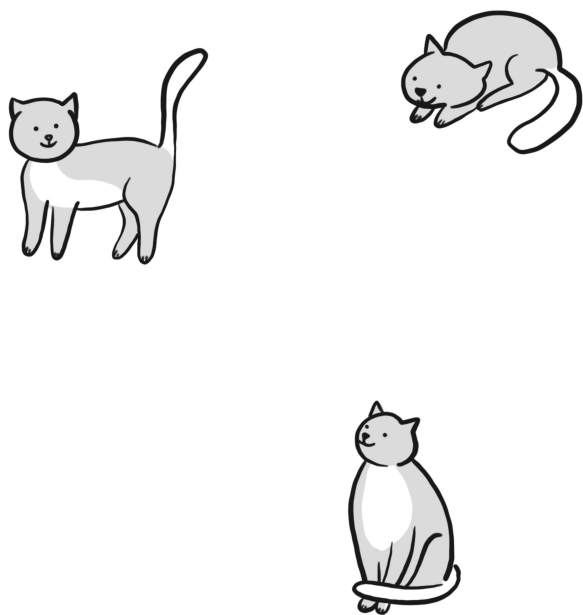
Section 2:

Considerations Before Starting a Group

Managing Multiple Relationships

Multiple Relationships is a term referring to a relationship whereby a service provider, including peer support facilitators, has more than one role in relationship to a group member or peer. This is very common in small communities and in settings where there might be one peer facilitator or support worker who is supporting a group of people. In these circumstances, it might be a common experience for the peer facilitator to have dual or multiple relationships with group members. For example, the facilitator might have a relationship with a peer participant who they have provided services to through another job or perhaps the facilitator and peer share similar social circles or community connections. Within smaller populations like communities of trans, gender diverse, and Two-Spirit people, multiple or dual relationships, and how to navigate these, is something to consider when starting a group.

Discussing multiple relationships with group members, including how facilitators and peer participants will navigate through these dynamics if they arise, will help create a sense of clarity and transparency that will support feelings of safety within the group. It is also important to have a plan in place to address the presence of multiple relationships. For example, if a group facilitator realizes they have an existing relationship with a participant who shows up to the group, the facilitator may want to find a way to discuss this privately with the group member and to inquire what their needs and comforts are around sharing the space together. Concerns about confidentiality may be heightened in this kind of situation so it is important for the group facilitator to provide reassurance about confidentiality and to provide comfort and reassurance to the group member who may be worried that their attendance may become shared information in another setting.



Section 2:

Considerations Before Starting a Group

When navigating multiple roles, it is important to focus on safety and confidentiality for the person attending the group and seeking support. It should also be recognized that peer facilitators have needs for support and social connection as well, so there may be a balancing act here to ensure the facilitator is comfortable accessing community support spaces, given their role as a peer support group facilitator. This is especially relevant in smaller communities where there are very limited options for accessing supports. That being said, it is important for the facilitator(s) to consider their role in terms of having more responsibility and power within the space as facilitators of the group. As you can imagine, there is a great variance in how this can present itself in practice. When in doubt: ask, communicate, and be open to making changes.



Section 2:

Considerations Before Starting a Group

Spread the Word

Once everything has been decided on, and prior to the first meeting, it's important to spread the word about your new peer support group!

To promote the group, you may find it helpful to create a promotional poster to distribute through your networks.

Places to spread the word:

- In the community: LGBTQ2S+ positive spaces, schools, community and recreation centres, Aboriginal Friendship Centres, Indigenous programs and services, counselling offices, medical centres, immigrant and refugee centres, disability resource centres, non-profit organizations, Neighborhood Houses, Foundry sites, youth programs, parent resource programs, and inclusive faith organizations.
- Online: Facebook groups, community and/or service provider email lists, local media platforms, online video, and other social media platforms.
- Trans Care BC: You can contact Trans Care BC to request that your group information is shared on the online Service Directory. You can visit the website, download the Peer Group Information Form, and submit it to Trans Care BC.



Section 3:

Choosing a Facilitator/Facilitators

Prior to the first meeting of your peer support group, the planning committee should decide who will facilitate the group, and how many facilitators are appropriate. You may want to consider the type of skills and experience the facilitator(s) will need. Skilled facilitator(s) are a crucial part of a peer support group and play an important role in supporting the group to meet their needs and goals.

How Many Facilitators?

Two facilitators can support each other so that in circumstances where a group member requires additional support, or if there is a situation which holds the attention of one of the facilitators, there is another person available to support the rest of the group. Rotating between different facilitators is an approach that can allow for diversity in facilitation styles and can give people an opportunity to develop their facilitation skills.

Responsibilities of a Facilitator

- To make sure that everyone has a chance to have their ideas and feelings expressed
- To guide the group discussion in a direction that supports the goals of the group
- To maintain a safe and respectful group environment, and to ensure that group guidelines are followed
- To make sure the space and logistics are taken care of
- To address any concerns or issues impacting group cohesion and safety



Section 3:

Choosing a Facilitator/Facilitators

Qualities of a Good Facilitator

Respect

- Recognize the right of each member to have their own perspective and be heard
- Remain open to positions that differ from your own
- Believe in everyone's ability to grow and change
- Honour everyone's right to make choices
- Encourage the full expression of ideas

Self-Reflection

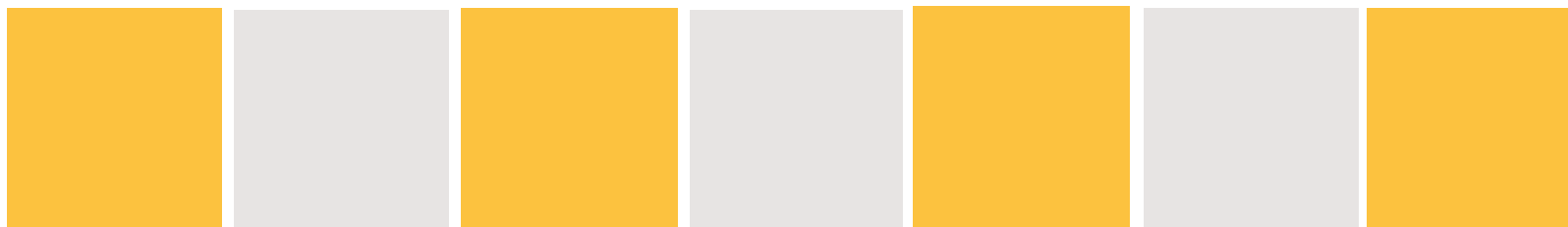
- Be consistent between the expression of your thoughts and feelings and the way you behave or act
- Be attentive to your own feelings, values, thoughts, and unresolved issues, and recognize the impact these may have on others
- Be aware of your own limits. It's important to set clear personal boundaries both during meetings and outside of meetings

Positive attitude

- Welcome everyone to each group meeting with warmth and kindness
- Accept each individual as a valuable member of the group
- Acknowledge and celebrate each person's strengths
- Provide feedback that focuses on observations rather than judgement

Being Proactive

- Be interested in and open to learning about facilitation
- Have the ability to be attentive to group atmosphere and dynamics
- Have the confidence and ability to intervene when necessary
- Knowledge of anti-oppressive beliefs, principles, and practices



Section 3:

Choosing a Facilitator/Facilitators

Intervening

Whenever you get a group of people together there is an inherent unpredictability with regards to conversations and group dynamics. There may be times where conversations can get sidetracked, participants can become fixated or overly negative about a particular subject, or people can say things that are triggering or offensive to others, even without intention.

One of the most important roles that a facilitator can play during these times is to appropriately intervene, and offer support to those who need it. For people who have never practiced intervening before, this can be a daunting prospect but some of the information outlined here can help build confidence in this area.

It can be helpful to remember that although intervening may feel uncomfortable, when it is necessary to do so you are ensuring that the group remains committed to its guidelines and striving towards creating a safe space for everyone.

When to Intervene

Making a decision about when to intervene can be difficult at times. It is important as a facilitator to try and consider the situation from all perspectives, and to apply your knowledge of individual group members to each circumstance.

There are a few key areas where intervention is needed:

- Violation of group agreements by a participant
- Conversation domination by a highly verbal participant
- Repetitive or tangential discussions
- Non-productive fixation on negativity beyond someone sharing their own personal experiences and feelings
- When someone is struggling with mental health or substance use in the space, in a way that renders the space less safe for other group members and/or requires additional support and referrals to appropriate resources.

Section 3:

Choosing a Facilitator/Facilitators

Interventions and Individual Needs

When considering facilitation and intervening through an anti-oppressive and trauma-informed lens, it is important to reflect on the holistic well-being of the person displaying disruptive or unexpected behaviour. Resist trying to figure out “what is wrong” with them or applying assumptions to the situation, and instead apply an understanding and optimistic perspective and be curious as to what is happening, and why. Try to address the behaviours that are happening and the individual’s support needs.

It is important to intervene in a way that preserves people’s dignity and avoids shaming or embarrassing them. Oftentimes this looks like asking a participant to chat before or after the meeting for a private conversation, to explain the behavior you are noticing and to determine how to best support them in tandem with the other members of the group. In certain circumstances the constraints of the location can prevent complete privacy, but try to find a corner or quiet place to have the conversation in a way that preserves confidentiality.

When supporting group members through a trauma-informed lens, it is important to consider the whole person and their history and experiences with past trauma, realizing that these experiences can result in certain coping strategies and behaviors that may be present during the group. When working with trans, gender diverse and Two-Spirit people, it is important to be aware of how prevalent trauma is within the community, and to commit to working from a trauma-informed stance (which, in some cases, could require specific knowledge seeking, education, and learning about how best to do this).

Section 3:

Choosing a Facilitator/Facilitators

How to Intervene

When creating group agreements, an important consideration to review with the group is about how facilitators will intervene when guidelines are not being followed. This allows for transparency about how the group will be facilitated and provides expectations to participants that there will be an intervention when needed, and what this intervention will look like.

Discussing openly that it may be necessary for the facilitator(s) to interrupt, redirect, or end conversations sets the stage for any potential interventions that may need to occur during the meeting. In some cases, participants may repeatedly break the group agreements and intervention strategies may need to include that a participant takes a break from the group for a definite or indefinite amount of time.

Section 3:

Choosing a Facilitator/Facilitators

Facilitator Feedback and Evaluation

Evaluation provides a space where individuals and groups can reflect on what is and isn't working, and it can be a way to determine where growth or attention should be directed.

Facilitator evaluation can take the form of self-reflection and evaluation by the facilitator themselves, or it could be the group providing feedback about the facilitator's skills and approach and how effectively they feel the group is running.

Self-Evaluation

Taking time to reflect and self-evaluate is important for facilitators because group facilitation can be challenging in many ways, especially if there are regular instances of difficult or harmful behaviour amongst members such as racist micro-aggressions or group members that need a lot of additional support.

It is important for facilitators to take time for considering how to sustain themselves in the work, and for reflection and self-evaluation of their role, skills, experiences, and what additional supports, trainings, or resources could strengthen their approach to facilitating.

There is a facilitator self-evaluation available in Appendix D which provides some questions for facilitators to reflect on their strengths, areas where growth is needed, as well as areas where they may need increased support. A discussion about self-care strategies may be useful to have with your fellow facilitators.

Remember: You can't pour water from an empty cup, so make sure you're taking time to replenish your reserves and ask for rest or support when you need it.

Section 3:

Choosing a Facilitator/Facilitators

Feedback

An important part of running a successful peer group is having a solid understanding about how the group is serving its members, as well as the ideas, suggestions, and feedback that members of the group can provide in order to strengthen the group and ensure it is meeting its intended goals.

As important as self-evaluation is, it's also important to check in with the group participants to see how they're feeling about the facilitation of the group.

It may feel intimidating to ask for direct performance feedback, so you may find it helpful to frame this as a way to learn about the group's needs, and the areas that can be improved upon, which will benefit everyone.

There is a group feedback form sample available in Appendix F which has some questions that can be used or adapted, to explore group evaluation and feedback.



Section 4:

Running Your Group

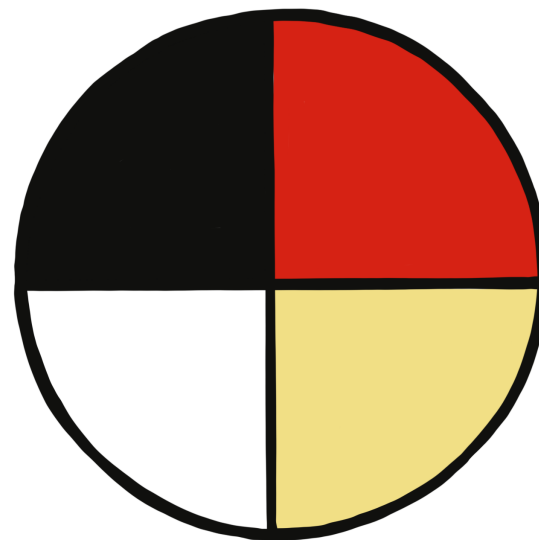
Land Acknowledgement

A land acknowledgement is an opportunity for the facilitator(s) to bring attention to colonization and provide an acknowledgement of, and support for, Indigenous people's connection to, and guardianship of, the land. This is an important part of creating a safer space for Indigenous group members, as well as awareness-building and working towards an anti-oppressive approach.

Prior to sharing a land acknowledgement, you need to learn about which Indigenous nations and groups have historically and presently occupied the area where your meeting is held, and whether the land was ceded, un-ceded, or if there were any treaties or agreements that should be mentioned in this acknowledgement. Using internet searches, visiting local libraries, visiting Friendship Centres, and asking Indigenous peers and elders are ways that you can learn more about the history of your area and the people who occupied it prior to the displacement that occurred as part of colonization.

It is advisable to practice how to pronounce any unfamiliar names prior to reading a land acknowledgement, as opposed to guessing or assuming. If you are not connected with people who are already familiar with these pronunciations, there are often examples available online.

As a part of the work of decolonizing the space, you may wish to learn more about strategies for supporting reconciliation by reading the ["Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action"](#), and determining ways that you can support a safer space for Indigenous group members through continued learning.



Section 4:

Running Your Group

Meeting Structure

Agenda

Depending on the goals of the group, you may wish to create an agenda ahead of time or work with the group to determine how to structure the meeting. Creating an agenda, and having it displayed during the meeting, is an excellent way to ensure everyone is on the same page about the flow of the group and how you will spend your time together. On the agenda, you may find it helpful to include a round of “check-ins” to allow everyone in the group to share about how they are doing, as well as an icebreaker activity to allow for group connection. It is important that icebreaker activities are accessible to everyone in the group.

Introductions/Pronouns/Check-In Round

At the beginning of each meeting, it is important to facilitate a round of introductions with all members of the group, to provide an opportunity for everyone to introduce themselves and state their pronouns, if they choose to. It is important to ensure group members know that sharing pronouns is optional, as this can be a complicated process for some. It could be good timing to include the “check-in” round during introductions. The facilitator may want to pose a “check-in” question to help provide structure to the round – such as, what’s been a lemon and a strawberry in your week (i.e. something that has been sweet, something that has been sour)?



Section 4:

Running Your Group

Establish Group Guidelines

Once the group has done introductions, pronouns, and a brief check-in, it is a good time to establish group guidelines. This is an important step for the group because creating/reviewing group guidelines together will help ensure that there are clear behavioral standards for everyone to follow (facilitators included) when sharing the space together. Although it is important to reach consensus about what guidelines are important to everyone in the group, there are key guidelines that should be standard and consistent across each group to ensure safety for everyone (such as maintaining confidentiality).

Facilitators are responsible for responding to any breaches of the group guidelines, and ensuring that group members are followed up with appropriately. You may find it helpful to include, as a guideline, what group members can expect from the facilitators if the guidelines are not followed.

For example: If guidelines are breached, facilitators will speak to the group member(s) about the behavior after the group. If the guideline breach affects the group immediately, facilitators may choose to address the behavior in the moment.

Some suggestions for commonly utilized group guidelines:

- One person speaks at a time (no cross talking)
- Quieter folks are encouraged to speak up, while the more talkative folks help make space for this
- Use appropriate and respectful language
- Respect people's identities, choices, experiences, and feelings
- Assume best intent, and try to be understanding that sometimes people make mistakes
- Confidentiality is critical- What is said in the group stays in the group
- Share from your own experience and use "I" statements
- Take care of yourself, whatever that may look like (ex: take bathroom breaks, stretch, drink water)

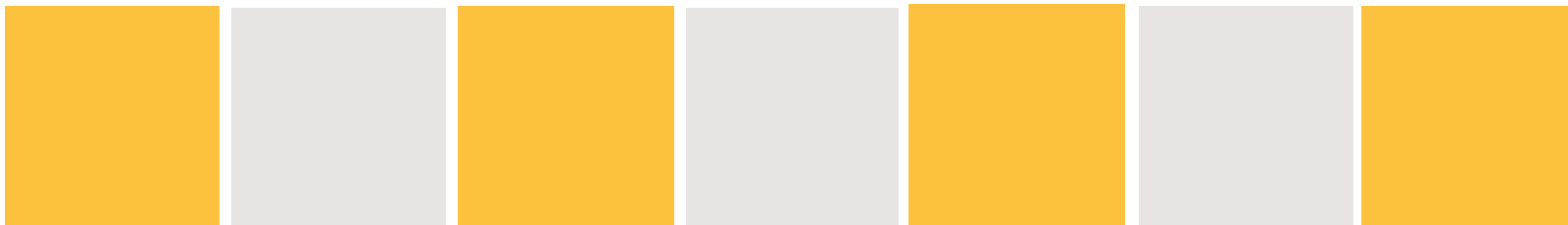
Section 4:

Running Your Group

Icebreakers

Icebreakers can be a way for people to share about themselves, connect with others, and get to know each other. They can be a helpful way of allowing the group to build trust and “warm up” before diving into discussions of a personal nature. Choosing an icebreaker that considers various learning and communication styles is important. This will require insight into the group so until you’ve developed more of a relationship with the group, it might be wise to err on the side of caution when choosing icebreakers and select icebreakers that are accessible, approachable, and low-effort. Icebreakers can consist of a simple question, such as “do you prefer cats or dogs?” or “what is your favorite summer/winter activity?”

Icebreakers can also be more in-depth and can be a facilitated exercise all on its own. Another idea is to engage group participants in coming up with icebreaker ideas.



Section 4:

Running Your Group

Here are some examples of icebreakers and a brief description of how to run them. You can find extensive lists and ideas for facilitated icebreakers by searching online. The icebreakers below can be good for group members who are getting to know each other.

Two Truths and a Lie

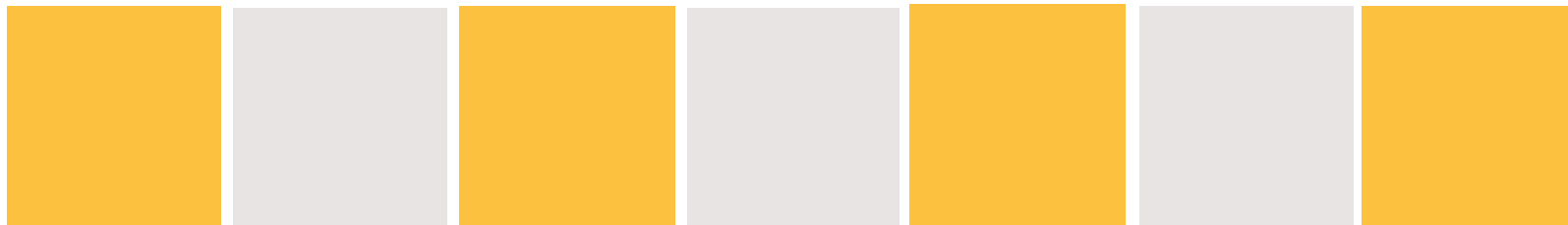
This ice breaker involves splitting people up into pairs or small groups, and having each person take turns coming up with three statements. Two of the statements are true, and one is a lie, and the objective is for the other members of the group or pair to guess which statements are true, and which one is a lie.

Never Have I Ever

This icebreaker starts with everyone getting into a circle, and the first person to take a turn to state something that they have never done before using the formula “Never have I ever _____”. An example could be “never have I ever been on an airplane.” Everyone in the circle who has at some point in their life done that thing counts a point. If nobody has done the thing in the statement, then the person who made the original “Never have I ever” statement counts a point against themselves. You can keep track of points on your fingers, in your head, or on a piece of paper. The game is played for however long you want, but often the exercise continues until someone gets 10 points. You can also forego the point system and simply play for fun.

Three Things in Common

Each person pairs up with someone that they don’t know well, and the two people try and find three things that they have in common. After each pair has determined what three things they have in common, everyone takes turns sharing with the entire group what those three things are.



Section 4:

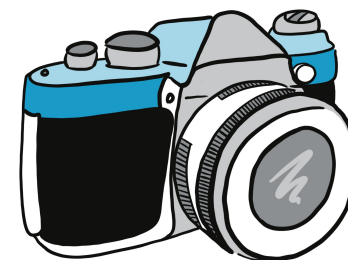
Running Your Group

Activity and Workshop Ideas

Group activities and workshops can be a fun way to mix up the usual format of the group. It's always a good idea to request feedback and ideas from group members, to ensure that workshops or special activities will meet the needs of the group. Connecting with local agencies that provide workshops, or hosting one yourself, can be a great way to add some variety to the group's activities, and provide an opportunity for education, connection, and fun!

Some ideas of activities and workshops

- Zine making workshop
- Creative writing workshop
- Board games
- Movie and discussion
- Anti-oppressive education workshop
- Pot-luck or sharing a meal together
- Going to different community events together
- Workshops on a variety of educational topics that are of interest to the group, such as: self-care strategies, legal rights, community organizing, etc.



Section 4:

Running Your Group

Discussion Topics

A discussion topic meeting is when the majority of the group's time is involved in discussing single or multiple topics, in whatever format the group desires. It can involve splitting group members into small discussion groups, going in a round to discuss the topic, or having whoever would like to share speaking on the topic.

Discussion meetings can provide a way to diversify the regular format of the group, but it can sometimes be difficult to think of a topic that will simultaneously inspire interesting discussion and be an appealing topic to all members. Some of what can make choosing topics easier is a familiarity with the individuals attending the group, but that isn't always possible especially with new groups or when the group is a drop-in. It is preferable to request topics from group members to ensure that the discussion is meeting their needs. A facilitator can decide if any topics are not appropriate for group discussion, or fall outside of group guidelines.

Here are some ideas for discussion topics:

- Coming out
- Social transition
- Medical transition
- Family
- Self-care
- Dating
- Trans-inclusive services and organizations

Guest Speakers

Bringing in a guest speaker is another great way to mix things up with the group format. When choosing a speaker, it is important to ensure that the topics are appropriate and gender-affirming.

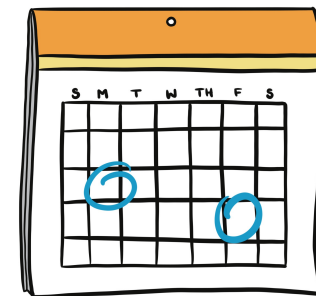
Sometimes groups will have a voluntary "guest speaker" position and that person will be responsible for connecting with guest speakers, and providing them with the details they need to know for attending the group. Another consideration is paying for guest speakers. Often, guest speakers will be service providers and will be coming to your group to offer a certain skill, knowledge-set, or sharing of tools/resources. This kind of commitment sometimes requires honoraria or payment for service. It is important to discuss this with your guest speakers in advance, to ensure clarity around any payment expectations.

Section 4:

Running Your Group

Special Days

There are set dates and time frames throughout the year that are dedicated to particular topics or events. You can use these dates to plan events or raise awareness at your group. (Referenced from the United Nations website and the CallOUT GSA Guide).



January

Jan 4 – World Braille Day
Jan 27 – International Holocaust Remembrance Day

February

All Month – Black History Month
Feb 20 – World Day of Social Justice

March

March 8 – International Women’s Day
March 20 – International Day of Happiness
March 21 – International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
March 31 – International Transgender Day of Visibility

April

April 2 – World Autism Awareness Day
April 7 – World Health Day

May

All Month – Asian Heritage Month
May 15 – International Day of Families

June

All Month – National Aboriginal Month
June 1 – Global Day of Parents
June 20 – World Refugee Day
June 21 – National Indigenous Peoples’ Day

July

July 30 – International Day of Friendship

August

August 9 – International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples

September

September 10 – World Suicide Prevention Day
September 23 – International Day of Sign Languages

October

All Month – Women’s History Month
October 1 – International Day of Older Persons
October 10 – World Mental Health Day
October 11 – National Coming Out Day

November

November 20 – Transgender Day of Remembrance
November 25 – International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

December

December 1 – World AIDS Day
December 3 – International Day of Persons with Disabilities
December 10 – Human Rights Day

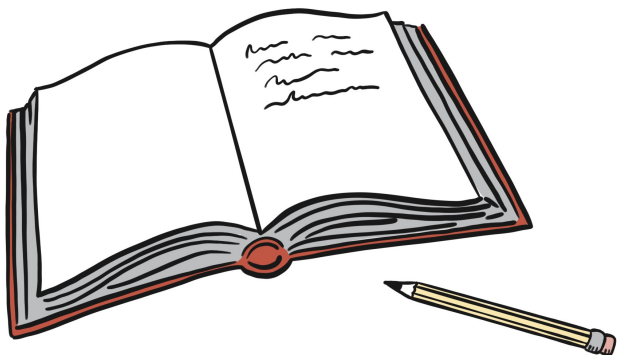
Section 4:

Running Your Group

Reflecting, Checking-in, and Evaluating

Why Is Reflection Important?

Reflection is an important part of maintaining a supportive group and building on the foundation you've already created. Reflection on behalf of facilitators and group members will offer insights into how well group meetings and activities are going, and how satisfied group members are about the group outcomes. It will allow you to identify areas of improvement and ways the group can continue to grow and flourish.



Facilitator Debriefs

Debriefing is a post-meeting opportunity for facilitators to connect with each other and discuss how well things are working within the group. A debrief can include reflection questions such as: Are group members honouring the group guidelines? How is the level of attendance? Are there recurring dynamics or behavior patterns that may be disruptive to the group that should be addressed?

Debriefing is also an opportunity for facilitators to share feedback with each other about facilitation approaches and styles, and to support each other if there are difficulties or high emotions during a meeting. If a meeting has been particularly difficult to facilitate, it is important for each facilitator to share their experience about what happened, and to reflect on ways addressing the issue could be improved or changed for next time (if at all).

It is also important for facilitators to address any discrepancies or differences about how to address these matters and to encourage each other to develop self-care strategies so they can return to the next meeting energized and prepared to lead the group again.

Section 4:

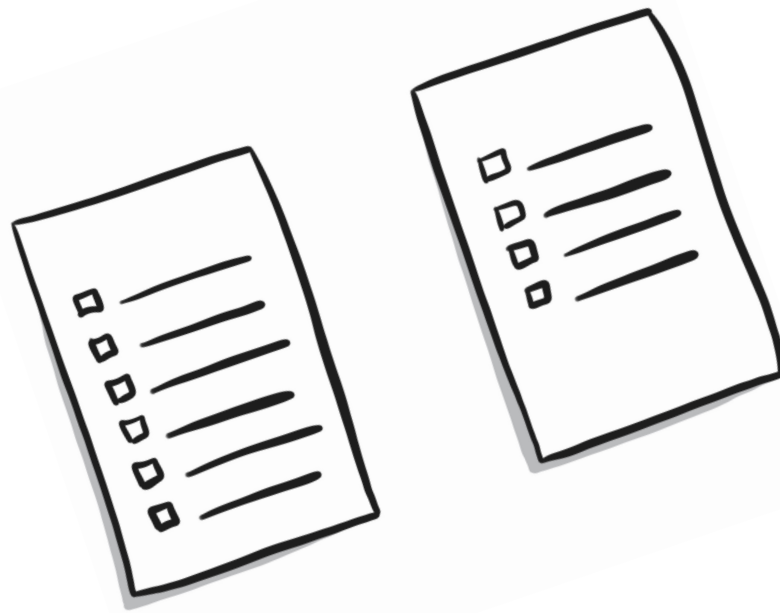
Running Your Group

Evaluating Group Outcomes

There are various ways to reflect on the group's progress and outcomes. You can build into your agenda an opportunity at the end of each group to check-in with group members about any support needs and to get a sense of general satisfaction of participants. You can do this through open dialogue, or using a flipchart to record responses, or you can do something as simple as a thumbs up or thumbs down about how the group went. It is important to schedule regular evaluation/feedback opportunities with the group. This can be done through surveys and questionnaires, facilitated roundtable discussions, and/or using sticky notes where responses can be recorded, summarized by themes, and then reflected back to the group.

There is a group feedback form in Appendix F which provides questions to explore group satisfaction and evaluate how well things are working.

It can be useful to create a debrief sheet for your group, to track important information about the group such as attendance, referrals provided, challenges/issues, and any other information you may want to keep as a record. This information along with evaluations can be useful in applying for grants, identifying future workshop ideas, or identifying change(s) within the group.



Appendix A:

Glossary

Accessibility: Accessibility refers to how well something accommodates access and use by all types of people including those with and without physical, cognitive, and other limitations or considerations.

Anti-Oppressive: Anti-oppression refers to a framework for behaviour and thought which emphasizes a directed effort to avoid thoughts, behaviours, and words which cause harm to marginalized populations.

Being Out/Coming Out: The process of becoming aware of one's gender and/or sexuality, accepting it, and telling others about it. This is an ongoing process that may not include everybody in all aspects of one's life. 'Coming out' usually occurs in stages and is a non-linear process. An individual may be 'out' in only some situations or to certain family members or associates and not others. Some may never 'come out' to anyone beside themselves. The significance, importance and validation associated with 'coming out' is criticized as a Westernized concept; cultures and languages around the world may not have a similar term, as issues of intimacy, personal relationships and sexual activity are considered deeply personal and private, and/or not central to one's identity.

BIMPOC: This term is an acronym for Black, Indigenous, Mixed Race, and People of Colour.

Colonization: The process and practice of domination, control, and forced subjugation of one people over another. In the context of Turtle Island (specifically Canada), European settlers began the process of the colonization of Indigenous peoples as early as the 1600s and continuing to this day, including through residential schools, violent assimilation tactics such as the 60's Scoop, policies that prohibited cultural roles and practices (including the attempted erasure of Two-Spirit people), and limiting or criminalizing access to land and resources.

Multiple Roles: This term refers to when a peer facilitator, support worker, therapist, or other type of service provider has multiple (dual) roles in a relationship with a client or participant. Although in mainstream society this isn't a particularly common occurrence, within the smaller population of trans, gender diverse, and Two-Spirit people (especially in smaller rural communities) dual roles can come up quite regularly.

Appendix A:

Glossary

Gender Diverse: A varied range of gender identities inclusive of non-binary, trans, and other gender identities.

Group Agreements: Group agreements are agreements or guidelines that can help establish boundaries and safety for group members and facilitators. Group agreements can be collaboratively created as a group, or you can find existing templates online.

Intersectional/Intersectionality: A theory coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s to draw attention to how different systems of oppressive structures and types of discrimination interact and manifest in the lives of minorities; for example, a queer black woman may experience oppression on the basis of her sexuality, gender, and race – and a unique experience of oppression based on how those identities intersect in her life.

Marginalized/Marginalization: This term refers to the process by which society forces people who do not fit into dominant norms to the margins of society through prejudiced attitudes, behaviours, and policies.

Intersectional Oppression: Oppression refers to the marginalization and harm that is caused to people who do not fit into society's dominant norms. This term refers to people who experience multiple overlapping types of societal oppression, or "intersectional" oppression.

Trans: Transgender, frequently abbreviated to 'trans,' is an umbrella term for a wide range of experiences and identities for people whose gender does not match with the gender they were assigned at birth. Identifying as trans is something that can only be decided by an individual for themselves and does not depend on criteria such as surgery or hormone treatment status.

Transfeminine: Describes someone who identifies as trans, and whose gender and/or expression is feminine.

Transmasculine: Describes someone who identifies as trans and whose gender and/or expression is masculine.

Appendix A: Glossary

Trauma-Informed: An approach for working with marginalized or oppressed populations, and people who have experienced trauma, which includes a consideration of the multi-faceted impacts that this history can have on people. When working with trans, gender diverse and Two-Spirit folks it is important to be aware of how prevalent trauma is within the community, and to commit to working from a trauma-informed stance (which in some cases could require specific knowledge seeking, education, and learning about how best to do this).

Two-Spirit: A term used by many Indigenous communities on Turtle Island (typically known as Canada and the United States) to describe people with diverse gender identities, gender expressions, gender roles, and sexual orientations. Two-Spirit people have been and are viewed differently across different Indigenous nations. Two-Spirit people were included and respected in most Indigenous communities, sometimes considered sacred and highly-revered. They often took on important roles as healers, mediators, and warriors. One of the devastating impacts of colonization was the attempted erasure of Two-Spirit people from Indigenous societies, due to the homophobic, transphobic and misogynistic values brought over and enforced by European settlers, which still effect many nations today. Despite this, Two-Spirit people have survived and their presence continues to grow in size and visibility, reclaiming traditional roles in their communities, and strengthening their relationships with their cultures and families. Not all people who are Indigenous and gender/sexually diverse will name themselves as Two-Spirit and this is their self-determination. Two-Spirit is something embodied exclusively by Indigenous people and is not to be taken on by non-Indigenous people.

Appendix B: Accessibility Guide

When considering accessibility, this guide is intended to provide a cursory introduction to the complexity of creating accessible spaces. There are far more in-depth guides available at R.A.M.P. or through privately contracted assessors. Another way to support trans, gender diverse, and Two-spirit people with disabilities and varying accessibility needs is to get people with disabilities involved in your planning committee and in the decision-making process for the meeting.

When considering accessibility, it is especially important to reflect on all spaces required for accessing an event, and especially bathrooms which are often overlooked when considering access. If participants of your event cannot use the washrooms then the event is not accessible.

You may find when considering accessibility needs that there are conflicting recommendations based on different needs, for example people with low vision often require well-lit rooms and people with post-concussion syndrome often experience significant pain in brightly lit areas. As opposed to aiming for perfection, it could be more worth cultivating an atmosphere and attitude of consultation, open-mindedness, and genuine intention to create the most accessible space possible given the reality of limited costs and spaces available.



Appendix B:

Accessibility Guide

Mobility

People with mobility impairments may use scooters, wheelchairs, canes, crutches, walkers, or may not require any assistive technology at all. Speaking broadly: creating an environment that is sufficiently spacious so that people that do use mobility aids can easily move about is a good first step in accommodating these group members.

Questions to consider

Are there stairs to get into the space?

Are all the doors, including the washroom, wide enough to allow access?

Can all of the doors be powered opened with button or motion activation?

Does the room have enough space for people to move about easily?

Ways to increase accessibility

Set up the tables or chairs in the space in a way that allow someone with a mobility aid to easily navigate.

Consider holding the meeting in a space with powered door openers on each door.



Appendix B:

Accessibility Guide

Visual

Those who experience visual impairments may have difficulty in low light, or with reading signage. There is great variance in vision and rarely is the situation as clear-cut as “seeing or non-seeing”.

Questions to consider

- Is the space sufficiently well-lit for people with low vision?
- Does anything important displayed in text form utilize a large easy to read font?
- Is any of the supporting literature or resources available in audio or braille format?

Ways to increase accessibility

- When displaying text utilize large easy to read sans-serif fonts
- Bring extra lighting if necessary.
- Make sure that there aren't any trip hazards such as cords, half-steps into the space, or torn carpet.

Auditory

Auditory impairments can take the form of impaired or unavailable hearing. It can also encompass those who have a difficult time hearing when there is a lot of background noise, or people who experience difficulties in very quiet spaces such as those with tinnitus.

Questions to consider

- How is the room's acoustics? Some rooms are set up in a way that dampens sound from carrying, and others amplify it and create echoes.
- Is there a lot of background noise from the environment?

Ways to increase accessibility

- Choose a space with limited background noise.
- Consider using a rug to dampen noise in spaces that echo.
- Consider having facilitators or translators available with skills in ASL, and other signed languages.

Appendix B:

Accessibility Guide

Cultural

Cultural accessibility is related to how accessible the space is to people who have difficult and painful histories with certain organizations. For example: Indigenous folks may feel reluctant to enter or seek support in spaces hosted in government buildings or hospitals due to the history of harm to Indigenous people by these organizations.

Questions to consider

- Is there an organization connected with this space?
- Is there any history of this organization in participating with cultural violence towards a marginalized group of people?
- Does this building resemble those that are connected to harmful legacies? (Example: converted churches)

Ways to increase accessibility

- Choose spaces with neutral affiliations.
- Involve those with lived experience in the planning and organization of the meeting including in selecting a location.
- Be reflective and open to learning about ways that the location is inaccessible for people from different cultures.

Other

There are so many other ways that spaces can be inaccessible and people can need accommodations, and it's impossible for them to all be listed in this guide. Some of the more common needs such as multiple chemical sensitivities, fragrance allergies, food and drink allergies are covered here.

Questions to consider

- Are there scented products used in the space (including the bathroom soap)?
- What type of food and drink is being served at the meeting? Is anyone in the group allergic to those things?

Ways to increase accessibility

- Ask group members to refrain from wearing perfumes and fragrances to create a scent reduced space.
- Provide unscented products when needed such as bathroom soap, dish washing liquid, or hand sanitizer.
- Be willing to make adjustments to the foods on offer, and for any prepared items ensure there is allergen information available and displayed.

Appendix C:

Intervention Strategies

Below are some ideas of how to address some of the more common difficult circumstances within groups.

Adapted with changes from [PeerNetBC](#) under the [Creative Commons License](#).

1

Power Dynamic:

Use of offensive language or expression of harmful beliefs (the various “isms” such as racism, sexism, etc.)

Effective Response:

1. The primary focus when encountering the expression of harmful language and beliefs is to intervene quickly and effectively to limit harm to others in the group. This can look like statements such as “We agreed at the beginning of the meeting that we would all use appropriate and respectful language, and what you just said violates that guideline. I would like to ask you to take a moment to reflect, and perhaps we could come back to you for you to finish sharing in a few moments?”

2. In less overt circumstances or when participants skirt the edges of appropriate and inappropriate it may be more effective to have a private conversation with them before or after the meeting. Doing some of the heavy work of explaining oppression and power dynamics may prevent future instances of these behaviours. It may be advisable to have a facilitator not harmed by the group members’ statements be the one to speak with them. For example: If a group member is making racist statements about people of colour, having a facilitator who is not a person of color be the one to intervene might be a safer option for the facilitator, and is an opportunity to model allyship.

3. In circumstances when someone shows up late, and is not present for the establishment of guidelines it may be necessary to intervene, point out the group guidelines, and then have a private conversation with them after the meeting to explain that the group guidelines are established at the beginning of meetings, and whether they are present or not they are expected to abide by them. If they would like to contribute to the formation of the guidelines then they will need to arrive in time to do so, but regardless the group will still be expected to be a safer space for all members.

Appendix C:

Intervention Strategies

2

Power Dynamic:

Domination by a highly verbal group member

Effective Response:

1. When one person is over-participating, everyone else is under-participating. Focus your efforts on the passive majority and encourage them to participate more. Examples: “let’s hear from this side of the room” or “any thoughts from those we haven’t heard from yet?” (aka ‘making space’).
2. If they interrupt other group members, it may be helpful to intervene and redirect the conversation back to the original member. This can look like allowing them to finish, and then redirecting attention back to the original group member. For example: “I noticed that Group Member A was not finished sharing their thoughts with the group. Group Member A, would you like to tell us more about what you were saying?”
3. Time limits: “Let’s hear from everyone. We have 2 minutes each”.
4. If a participant consistently participates in dominating the group, intervening by reminding them that the group guidelines require each member to make space for others could be an effective strategy. For example: “Group Member A, we’ve heard a lot from you today and there are many people in the group who have not shared. I would like to make more space for them to speak. Perhaps this can be a time for you to practice hearing others?” When intervening publicly like this be mindful of where group members are at emotionally. If the situation is not too dire perhaps a private conversation with the group member is a good option, and especially for group members who might feel embarrassed or hurt by being asked to speak less and listen more.

Appendix C:

Intervention Strategies

3

Power Dynamic:

Loud and repetitive

Effective Response:

1. People repeat themselves because they don't feel heard. Summarize the person's point of view until they feel understood. If it still continues, be curious about the person's need to be repetitive i.e. "I really hear what you are saying. I'm also noticing that we do not seem to be moving forward with the discussion. What is going on for you? Is there anything you need right now?"

2. For emotional topics especially, allow "Soap Box" time whereby anyone is allowed to talk for a specific time allotment if they feel called to do so. Tell them this is their time to get passionate, and bring feelings into the mix. Soap Box Time is still not a space where harmful or oppressive language should be expressed by group members, and group guidelines should still be followed

4

Power Dynamic:

One-uppers (Everything is worse for me than for anyone else)

Effective Response:

1. In circumstances where a group member is loudly or repetitively framing themselves as the most harmed or most victimized person it may be advisable to check in with the member privately before or after the meeting to find out if they are aware that they are doing this, and if they realize that it could be making other feel that their struggles are diminished. It may be that the group member doesn't realize that they are doing this.

2. If there appears in the group to be discomfort or frustration with this behaviour less private intervention may need to occur. Intervening and emphasizing publically that each individual's experiences are their own, and that it is important to avoid comparisons could help circumvent this behaviour.

Appendix C: Intervention Strategies

5

Power Dynamic:

Group members speak using collective statements, instead of “I” statements. For example: “Well all _____ people do this.”

Effective Response:

1. Remind the group member that making blanket statements can feel bad for other group members to hear, and that they should focus on speaking only about their own experiences using “I feel” statements.



Appendix D:

Facilitator Self Evaluation Questionnaire

What is your level of experience with facilitating?

What are your greatest strengths as a facilitator?

What are some potential challenges you experience (or may experience) in your role as facilitator?

What are the qualities or strengths of facilitators that have impressed you, or who have helped guide your learning?

What is a growth related goal that you would like to set for yourself over the next year?

What are some areas where you need additional support, resources, and/or training?

Appendix E:

Sample Agenda

The agenda below is provided only as an example, and the agenda your group decides upon will likely look different based on your group's needs. Feel free to adapt your agenda based on the type of flexibility and flow you need.

Adult Peer Support Group Agenda - 12:00pm to 2:00pm	
12:00 - 12:20	Land Acknowledgement, Check-ins, and Pronoun Round
12:20 - 12:40	Establishing Group Agreements
12:40 - 1:00	Icebreaker: Two Truths and a Lie
1:00 - 1:15	Break
1:15 - 1:45	Group Discussion – Topic example: Coming Out
1:45 - 2:00	Wrap up, Check-outs



Appendix F:

Sample Group Feedback Form

How long have you been attending this peer support group?

How did you hear about this peer support group?

What have you found most beneficial about these meetings?

Is there anything you would change about the meetings to improve your experience or accessibility?

Have you ever had to deal with oppressive language or challenging power dynamics at meetings? If yes, did you feel adequately seen and supported by the facilitators when this occurred?

Please share any other feedback with us. We'd love to hear your comments!

Appendix G:

References and Resources

ArtReach

<https://www.artreach.org/>

Forge

<https://forge-forward.org/>

Gender Creative Kids

<https://gendercreativekids.ca/>

Gender Spectrum

<https://www.genderspectrum.org/>

Hu, J., Wang, X., Guo, S. et al. (2019). **Peer support interventions for breast cancer patients: a systematic review**. Breast Cancer Research and Treatment, Volume 174, Issue 2, pp 325-341 doi://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1007/s10549-018-5033-2

MOSAIC Partnership Toolkit

<https://www.mosaicbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/partnership-Toolkit.pdf>

Not On Our Backs: Supporting Counsellors in Navigating the Ethics of Multiple Relationships Within Queer, Two Spirit, and/or Trans Communities

<https://vikkireynoldsdotca.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/2013notonourbackseverettmacfarlanereynoldsanderson.pdf>

Appendix G:

References and Resources

Pfeiffer, P. N., Heisler, M., Piette, J. D., Rogers, M. A. M., Valenstein, M. (2011) **Efficacy of peer support interventions for depression: a meta-analysis.** General Hospital Psychiatry, Volume 33, Issue 1, pp 29-36 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2010.10.002>

PeerNet BC

<http://www.peernetbc.com/>

Peer Support Canada

<https://peersupportcanada.ca/>

PFLAG Canada

<https://pflagcanada.ca/>

Pride Education Network

<http://pridenet.ca/>

Qmunity

<https://qmunity.ca/>

Self-Help Resource Centre

<http://www.selfhelp.on.ca/site/wp-content/uploads/MH-Peer-Support-Manual1.pdf>

The 519

<http://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/our-resources>

Trans Care BC - Online Peer Group Service Directory (and form to add new groups)

<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/srvc-directory>

Trans Pulse Project

<http://transpulseproject.ca/>