

TIP SHEET FOR PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

BCNA National Summit 2017

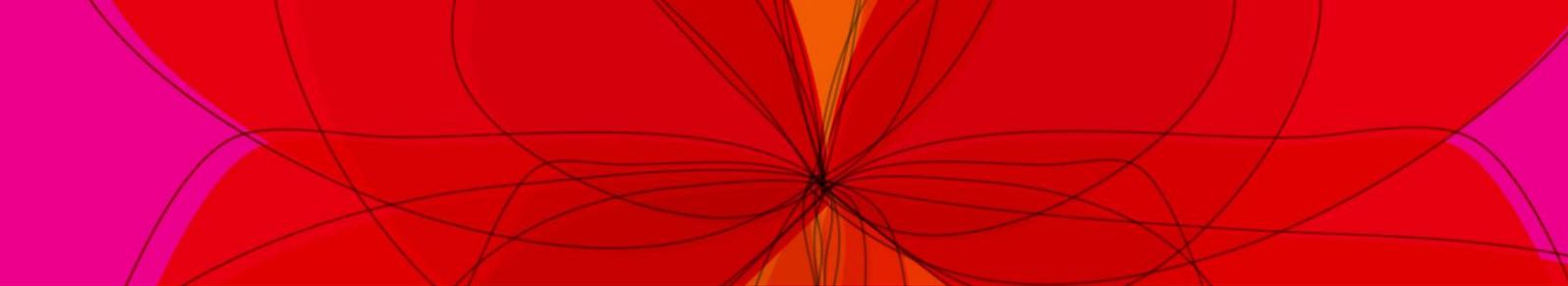
Effective communication

In peer support, being part of group discussions is entering into a dialogue with other people. That means, effective communication in a group is not just about what you say and do, it includes being aware of what other group members contribute to the conversation.

Did you know that 65 per cent of what we communication is non-verbal? Non-verbal communication includes eye contact, the tone of your voice, your posture, your facial expressions and the way you move your body.

Below we have gathered tips for effective communication in a peer support group setting. Some relate to your verbal and non-verbal communication, while others relate to being aware of other members' verbal and non-verbal communication.

Eye contact	Eye contact with the speaker helps them know that they have your attention and you are listening to what they have to say.
Use people's names when speaking to them	Using your group members' names when speaking to them helps to build rapport and reinforces a sense of belonging.
Address group interaction issues or concerns early	Be aware of what is going on around you. How are group members interacting and how have members reacted to group conversation? If you notice anything concerning, address it – reach out to the group member during a break or after the meeting or speak with your group facilitator if appropriate.
One person speaks at a time	Remind group members that only one person speaks at a time. You can use tools like a 'talking stick' to help facilitate this. Incorporating this expectation in to your group agreement means that if a group member interrupts persistently you can refer back to the group agreement.
Keep conversations on a personal and feeling level	When talking about feelings encourage people to use 'I' statements rather than 'you' and 'we' statements. Using 'I' statements gives the speaker ownership of their thoughts and feelings.
Think about your body language	Helpful non-verbal communication techniques include affirmative movements such as nodding your head or smiling, leaning slightly forward in your chair and uncrossing your arms. These all indicate you are actively listening to the speaker.
Be aware of what you contribute to the group	Think about what you bring to the group. Do you share your ideas and contribute to group discussions? Do you give others the space to speak or do you tend to dominate conversation? Take some time to reflect on how you are contributing to the group.



Reflection exercise

Of the tips provided, which do you think is/would be the hardest to do and why?

What do you think your group does well in encouraging effective communication between members?

What do you think your group could do better to improve communication between members?

In thinking about your own interaction in your group, are there any verbal or non-verbal communication techniques that you might want to work on?

How might having a group agreement help with encouraging members to use effective communication techniques when interacting with others?