

# Recovery Devon

# Peer Support

# Handbook

Useful ideas and information for those  
considering starting a peer support group



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# Useful Links

Several sites are mentioned in this document. On many devices you will be able to click the **bold green link** to visit the site. If not, you can use these links to copy and paste.

## **Hearing Voices**

<https://www.hearing-voices.org/>

## **ReThink**

<https://www.rethink.org/about-us/our-support-groups>

## **Mind**

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/peer-support/what-kinds-of-peer-support-are-there/#Groups>

## **Time To Change**

<https://www.time-to-change.org.uk/>

## **ADFAM Peer Support Toolkit**

[http://www.adfam.org.uk/cms/docs/Skills\\_Consortium\\_Peer\\_Support\\_Kit\\_Final.pdf](http://www.adfam.org.uk/cms/docs/Skills_Consortium_Peer_Support_Kit_Final.pdf)

## **Recovery Devon**

<https://recoverydevon.co.uk/>

## **Ann Ley, Understanding Peer Support**

[https://recoverydevon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/RD\\_Peer\\_Support\\_Discussion\\_Document.pdf](https://recoverydevon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/RD_Peer_Support_Discussion_Document.pdf)

## **Peer Support Info**

[https://recoverydevon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/RD\\_Peer\\_Support\\_Discussion\\_Document.pdf](https://recoverydevon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/RD_Peer_Support_Discussion_Document.pdf)

## **Introduction to Recovery**

[https://recoverydevon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/Recovery\\_Devon\\_leaflet.pdf](https://recoverydevon.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/Recovery_Devon_leaflet.pdf)

## **Facebook help on groups**

<https://www.facebook.com/help/220336891328465>

## **DBS - Disclosure & Barring Service Information**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service>

## What is this handbook?

While not a comprehensive guide, this handbook aims to provide the essential starting guides, information and tools for setting up a peer support group.

Peer support can be a transformative resource, enabling communities and groups to support each other. Within mental health, becoming a peer-supporter can be a pathway to one's own recovery. Peer support also broadens the help available to everyone – especially important when some services struggle for funding or staffing.



# Recovery Peer Support

Recovery peer support brings people together with a focus on encouraging and sharing strategies for recovery. Peer support happens when people with lived experience of mental health challenges share their experiences in a mutually supportive way. Peer support has been found to be a powerful factor in mental health recovery. It can take many forms, from the informal support networks that arise spontaneously in inpatient units to the more formal model of peer support workers employed alongside professionals in some mental health teams. Peer support networks can provide respect

and support for people who are struggling with their mental health. They can also offer hope and community for people feeling alone with their problems.

There are already a number of peer support groups available. Check out the **Hearing Voices Network**, **Rethink**, and **Mind** websites for information about groups which might be meeting in your area. If you want to start your own Recovery Peer Support group we have put together a template and some FAQs to get you started.



# Setting up a Recovery Peer Support Group

Recovery Devon encourages the development of Recovery Peer Support groups to build stronger recovery networks. Recovery Peers are people with lived experience of mental health challenges who come together to support each other's recovery. Peer support has been shown to offer real benefits to everyone involved, including improvement of symptoms, lower reliance on medication and treatment services, higher levels of wellbeing, increased self-esteem and personal empowerment. (See Ann Ley, '[Understanding Peer Support](#)'.)

A Recovery Peer Support group should be founded on recovery principles and will refer to those principles as a guide for discussion and group management.

## Principles of Recovery

- Treat others with respect regardless of their background
- See mental health challenges as experiences, not as impairments or disabilities
- Respect the value of lived experience equally with academic or clinical qualifications
- Seek to provide a community which enables healing, so that no-one feels alone
- Understand that every person has unique needs, in treatment and in life
- Promote and encourage participation, creativity, empowerment, equality and above all things, hope for all

See our [Introduction to Recovery](#) for more information.

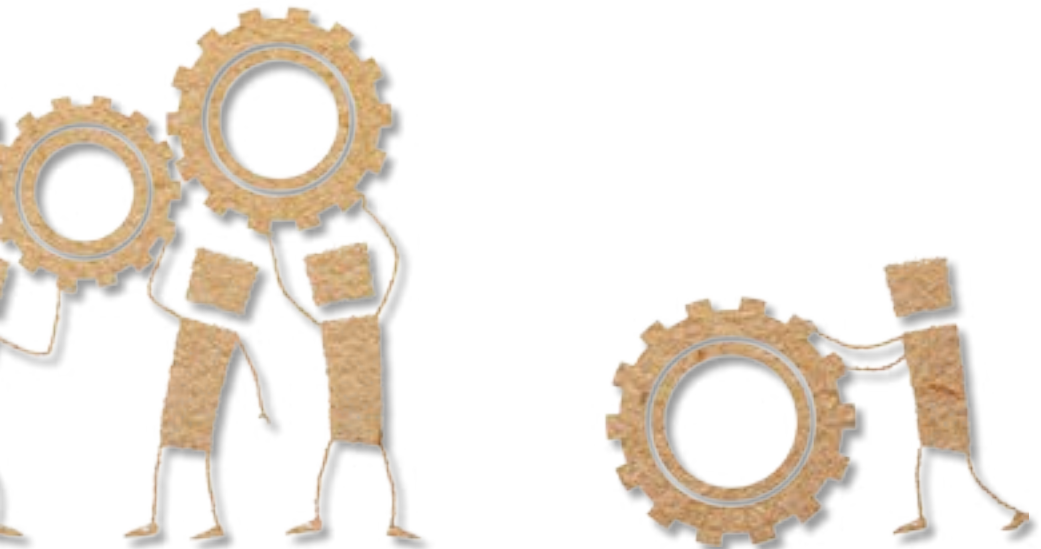


## Practical steps to establish your group

- Get in contact with other people in your area interested in Recovery Peer Support.
- Find a meeting space. Public or private? Do you need to hire a room or will you meet in a community cafe? We suggest that you avoid meeting in each other's homes to keep the meeting space neutral and social and to maintain boundaries between your private life and your peer support activity.
- Decide on whether the group will be open (meetings advertised which anyone can attend) or closed (a specific group of people committed to meeting regularly).
- Decide whether the group will be ongoing or time-limited (open groups are usually ongoing, closed groups tend to set a limit of, for example, six months.)
- Decide on structure and facilitation. How often will the group meet and for how long? Monthly meetings for two hours is a good working model. Who will be responsible for booking the venue, arriving first, tidying up at the end, deciding on dates for the meetings, etc? One or two people might be motivated to fill these roles, or the group could decide to share responsibilities.



- Ground rules. We recommend that Recovery Peer Support groups use the Principles of Recovery (above) as the starting point for their group ground rules. Confidentiality is also important. You can write the ground rules on a large sheet of paper and blutack them to the wall of your meeting room or print them out for each member of the group to keep.
- Refreshments: whether you are meeting in a cafe or a hired room, teas and coffees and biscuits facilitate good conversations. Build in a shared budget for refreshments.
- Boundaries and safety. Building a Recovery Peer Support Group involves meeting new people. It is a good idea to keep the meetings in a neutral, public space and not to share too much private information. Use emails or a Facebook page to communicate with new members rather than giving out your phone number and address. If you ever have any concerns about the immediate safety of yourself or other members of the group contact the police on 999. Less urgent concerns about safeguarding yourself or others can be discussed with Devon Care Direct (0345 155 1007).
- Evolution and change: groups go through different stages as they form, stabilise and - eventually - disband. Be prepared to discuss and reflect on the way the group is working and any problems that arise.





# Using our experiences to support each other's recovery

## Q&A

### What is Recovery Peer Support?

Recovery Peer Support is where people use their personal experience to support each other with their recovery. Many people feel they have learned useful ways of living alongside their mental health problem and find it mutually helpful to share these with others. Recovery Peer Support is special because it is rooted in recovery values and principles.

### What are the benefits of Recovery Peer Support?

Getting together with people who have similar experiences has many proven benefits: friendship, conversation, laughter (and sometimes tears), feeling less alone and more connected, getting out of the house, finding new things in common, sharing time together, tea and cake but most of all finding that your hard-won experiences are valued by others. Recovery Peer Support focuses on finding ways to move towards what recovery looks like for you.

### What are Recovery Values?

Further information is freely available for viewing on the Recovery Devon website but Recovery values include: Hope, Choice, Diversity, Meaningfulness, Acceptance, Inclusion, Citizenship, Partnership-working, Mutual respect, Empowerment, Person-centred, Believing in people, Opportunity, Control (over one's life), Friendship, Love, Creativity and Spirituality.

Taken from: 'Putting Recovery at the heart of all we do' (see links).





## Can anyone start a Recovery Peer Support Group?

If you have experienced mental health challenges and wish to meet with like-minded people to further each other's recovery than you could start a Recovery Peer Support Group. You don't need to have any specific qualifications to start a group although you may wish to have a stated purpose or set aims for any group you decide to form.

## What if I wish to be supported but am not sure about supporting others?

Recovery Peer Support groups will have a range of people attending some of whom will wish to contribute more than others. At first you may have more of a 'supported' role and then, as time passes you may feel more able to offer support to others. As long as you feel being part of the group is aiding your recovery, any level of involvement is fine.

## How do I go about starting a Recovery Peer Support Group?

Take a look at the above guidance notes and talk it through with some trusted friends, family or your care coordinator if you have one. Recovery Devon can be contacted by phone or email to offer additional help and support.

## What resources are available?

There are a wealth of resources online for those wishing to start a Recovery Peer Support Group and general information can be found on the **Recovery Devon** website and also **Mind's** website.

## What's the difference between an open and a closed group?

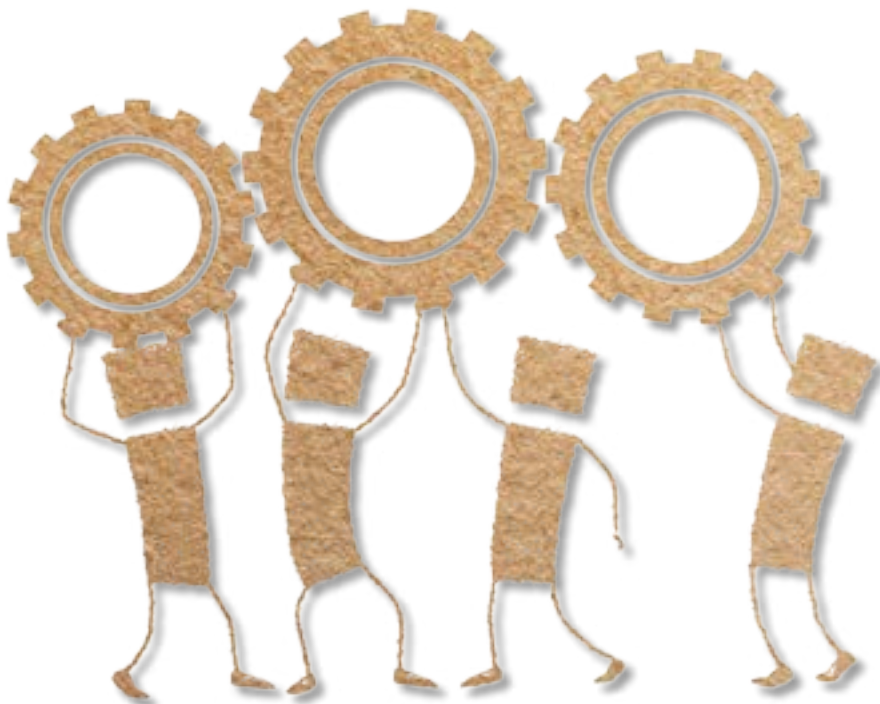
An open group has an undefined number of group members with new people coming and going on a regular basis. A closed group has a fixed number of group members and usually has a set duration. There are also differences between an open (public), closed and a secret group on Facebook and you can find **guidance on those here**.

## What about a venue?

Having a regular place to meet is an important consideration for most groups and these are usually cafes with a supportive owner. However, other venues can be considered such as sports and leisure centres, pubs (though this might not always be appropriate) or even a local bowling alley. In all cases it is advisable to have a conversation with the owner and possibly even negotiate favourable booking terms. It is advisable to avoid meeting in each other's homes at least in the early days of a group forming and the group may need to have a discussion about when and where is appropriate to meet. For all venues it will be useful to consider accessibility especially if a group member has a disability and also find out about bus routes as well as exploring the possibility of car-sharing.

## How do you start a conversation?

Starting a conversation about mental wellbeing can sometimes be a challenge but there is some great advice on the [Time to Change](#) website. Often when meeting up many different and varied topics of conversation will arise but being with people who share an understanding of the challenges each are facing can be hugely supportive to group members.



## What about ongoing costs?

Even the smallest of Recovery Peer Support Groups may incur some ongoing costs so you may introduce a subscription fee to cover venue/ room hire or even explore ways of raising funds. Your local CVS should be able to provide fundraising information and even training. Money issues can sometimes be a potential for conflict within a group so seek ways to ensure all members are happy with whatever arrangement you decide. Some groups may wish to cover expenses as they arise on a meeting by meeting basis.

## How the group should be structured?

We mentioned closed and open groups earlier and another consideration is leadership and responsibility. One member may decide to make group arrangements with the consent of the others or a group may elect to rotate responsibility which may include making bookings, collecting subs and being an admin on a Facebook group. You may want to formalise your group after a while by becoming a constitutionalised group. You will need; A chairperson—who is responsible overall, a leadership role. A treasurer—who looks after the money. A secretary—who takes minutes and sets agendas. Some funders and charities might want you to be constitutionalised to be eligible for funding, they also might want to see evidence that the group is working well and achieving agreed goals. Please bear in mind though that the attraction of a Recovery Peer Support Group may well be its simplicity and it's fine to stay informal without the need to expand. Bigger isn't always better!

## What happens if things go wrong?

If and when conflict arises within a group it is worth trying to resolve the issue as a group. This means bringing the issue to the table and finding a resolution that the whole membership agrees upon. In certain circumstances there may be a need to involve external mediation and it is worthwhile discussing as a group who may be able to provide such a service should the need arise. One way to prevent things going wrong is to have clear boundaries and a set of ground rules which are collaboratively produced and regularly reviewed.

## Do we need DBS checks?

An informal group wouldn't necessarily need to have **DBS** (Disclosure & Barring Service) checks but this will become a consideration should the group become constituted.

## What about safeguarding, confidentiality and setting boundaries?

This should be a consideration for any group and it is recommended that a conversation regarding who is responsible for safeguarding takes place early in the group's formation.

A useful resource for guidance on safeguarding, confidentiality and boundaries can be found here from the **Substance Misuse Skills Consortium Peer Support Toolkit** (ADFAM Toolkit in links above).

## What about the lifespan of a group?

Having a plan for the group ending for whatever reason can be very useful. Some people from the group may wish to remain friends and keep in touch and others may seek to join a different group. Having a plan also means a decision is made about what to do with unspent funds and any other group resources.

## How do I advertise the group?

Recovery Devon would be happy to advertise your group via our networks including the Recovery Exchange and social media. There may already be a group that meets your needs so searching for established peer support groups would be a good idea before setting up a new one. Please bear in mind the issue of disclosure when advertising a group – there are consequences to publicly disclosing a mental health condition although many of these can be positive. Reading about others who have opened up about their mental health can provide inspiration and some personal testimonies can be found on the **Time to Change** website.

## Is Recovery Devon able to offer support?

Recovery Devon has access to a great deal of information on Peer Support as well as people who have been involved with peer groups. A member of the Recovery Devon team could arrange to visit your group or arrange to speak on the phone. Our staff work part-time and can be contacted via email at [recoverydevon@gmail.com](mailto:recoverydevon@gmail.com) or by phone on 07824 161192.



If you can't find what you need in the world, create it so that others will.

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