



Top tips from peer supporters across the emergency services

Overcoming challenges of prejudice around peer support and mental health:

- Get people at all levels involved; personal stories are very powerful, especially if you identify with the individual due to their role or gender etc.
- Having an organisation's leader speak out about their personal experience of mental health problems could have a really big impact.

It is all about choice and emotional intelligence.

Support for you as a peer supporter:

- It is important to have someone overseeing the peer support programme who can monitor things, like how many individuals people are supporting, and check in with them.
- Procedural guidance can be really helpful to have in place, there are lots of examples out there online, especially from America.

Helping peer supporters look after their own wellbeing is vitally important.

Supporting your own wellbeing:

- Think about having a buddy system – which is where peer supporters are placed in small groups and provide support and peer supervision to each other.
- You may want to utilise [Wellness Action Plans](#) and the [Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale](#) to empower peer supporters to look after their wellbeing.

Boundaries:

- It's important to talk about confidentiality, including its limits, and how peer supporters can communicate this.
- Training in this area is important and needs to include discussion on boundaries, self-awareness and protective behaviours.





Training:

- Providing ongoing training and bringing peer supporters together, virtually, or face to face is central.
- It's important to plan in periodic meetings or training for peer supporters
- Presentation skills training is important so that peer supporters can pass their knowledge onto others.
- Two day mental health first aid training is a useful tool.
- Utilising training that exists within the organisation or inviting people from different teams, and other professionals or charities to talk to peer supporters could be useful.

**Empathising in a human way can be really effective,
not necessarily needing knowledge**

Tools to help in peer support interactions:

- Getting people to access peer support can be a barrier, so things like newsletters, badges and other promotional items are important.
- Apps can be useful tools, as can websites, books and a live signposting document.

**The most important and best tool is ourselves and our ability to find
things that may help the individual**

Evaluating peer support:

- In peer support it is important to measure the outputs, this could be how many contacts a peer supporter makes or the absence of complaints around peer support. Then to also look at outcomes, this could be in the form of qualitative data such as feedback and case studies, or correlations such as improvements in sickness absence levels and staff retention.
- The wellbeing of peer supporters is something that can be monitored to see its impact. Local universities may be able to help with evaluating this as part of their research if they have a focus on peer support.
- You may want to add a question on your staff survey around peer support; this can help you understand if people know about it, and if they do their thoughts on it.

You cannot prove everything

