

# About Suffolk Mind

Suffolk Mind is a registered charity affiliated to the national charity Mind and is committed to improving the lives of people with mental health issues in Suffolk.

All of our services are easy to access and you can self-refer to most by contacting us on **0300 111 6000** and speaking to a member of our team. To see our full range of services, you can call us and request a copy of our service booklet or look at our website [www.suffolkmind.org.uk](http://www.suffolkmind.org.uk).

# Simple steps to start your own peer support group



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LOTTERY FUNDED



Improving mental health through peer support



# What is 'peer' support?

Peer support is getting support from people who are equal to you – your peers. In a peer group you are able to talk to other people who truly have first hand experience of similar situations. This 'toolkit' is to aid the set up of peer groups.

We are all responsible for ourselves – who we are and what we do. When peers do things together they run their group or event together and no one person is 'in charge'. Everyone takes responsibility, talking things through and making decisions together.



Sometimes people take on the role of organiser or leader in the group to help move things along but everyone has a role to play and can take their turn at things to help the group. A peer group works best when everyone participates and takes responsibility for themselves but also works together for the good of the group. People may also identify with their peers according to shared interests, issues, life experiences or personal attributes.

“Being part of a group of people that have been through what I have makes so much difference – I know I am not alone. We all support each other and learn from each other”

## Peer support and mental health

Whilst anyone with a long term mental health condition can benefit from peer support, it is of particular benefit to certain individuals;

- people with low mood, anxiety, stress or social isolation
- people who are ready and want to rebuild their lives
- people who need support through shared experience
- people newly diagnosed and who want to find out more

It is important to understand that not everyone will be ready for this model of peer support and as such, honesty and transparency is the key to forming a successful peer support group where everyone feels relaxed and comfortable.

## Our vision

Suffolk Mind has always championed peer activities integrating it into the very heart of everything we do. We believe in promoting peer self help that remains true to the underpinning model of empowering each member to take responsibility for themselves with support.

We have been funded by Mind and the Big Lottery to deliver support about peer activity as part of their aim that everyone should have access to good quality peer support wherever they live.



## Safeguarding

Safeguarding means protecting people's health, wellbeing and human rights, and enabling them to live free from harm, abuse and neglect. There may be times where you are not sure what action you should take or you need support and guidance about keeping everybody safe. For guidance and support call **Customer First on 0808 800 4005** (free phone)

## Your next step...



## Further help

Community Action Suffolk 01473 345400

Suffolk Mind 0300 111 6000

Suffolk User Forum 01473 329307

Suffolk Libraries [www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/mhis](http://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/mhis)

## Online peer support

Elefriends is a supportive online community where you can be yourself. **[www.elefriends.org.uk](http://www.elefriends.org.uk)**



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## Step 1 - your idea - the basics

Decide what your groups purpose is and what you want to achieve. It will be useful to write a few lines to define this;

- My idea is...
- Who my idea is for and why...
- Do you have a particular skill or activity you want to include?
- What do I want to achieve from this...

## Step 2 Firming up

- Is there already someone else or another organisation or charity running a similar group that you could join up with?
- Can you find any expertise locally to do some research with or another peer group to chat through your idea with.
- Set a time and appropriate place for your group to meet e.g. how many hours do you want to meet for and how often. Consider where you can meet that is either free or cheap to hire (school, church, library, coffee shop or another public building that might be suitable and accessible for everyone) Check they have Public Liability insurance.
- How will you fund the group - room hire and refreshments - will there be a charge to attend?
- How large will the group be - You need a group that is large enough to function without full attendance but small enough to still engage with everyone. (between 5—12 people is usually manageable)
- Is the group **open** or **closed** - (an open group means that people can just drop in any time and closed means a more formal invite is required).
- Be open about others peoples ideas and contributions.
- Think about people getting there, is there somewhere to park? Or near a bus or train station?
- How will people contact you to self refer?

## Step 6 Funding and running

It is easier and quicker to find funds locally. Be transparent right from the beginning about the real cost of running the group. Ask people to come forward with ideas or places locally they have seen that might help, i.e.

- Locality budgets from your local councillor.
- Local supermarkets and shops.
- Ask for help from Community Action Suffolk who have dedicated help available for funding enquiries.
- Consider a weekly contribution from members towards costs and refreshments (this is a good idea anyway).

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.

Community Action Suffolk can help with this.

## Step 5 Problem solving

Remember that peer groups are a shared responsibility and as such tackling a problem should be a group effort. Problems might be;

- A person talking too much.
- Someone is not well enough to attend.
- Being late or non attendance.
- Someone who is upsetting others within the group.

It is important that there is a conversation around who and how the group will address problems as they arise. Ideally this should be done when discussing boundaries or soon after.

Write down this procedure so that it is transparent to everyone when they first join, it can then be referred back to at a later date if needed.

Consider what language you are using to talk to someone who might be causing a problem.

- Use "I" and "we" statements.
- Give an opportunity for behaviour to be adjusted, they might not be aware themselves.
- Suggest an alternative and **all agree** on the consequences if behaviour continues.

For information on safeguarding please see Page 11.

## Step 3 Advertising the group

- Consider where you might find like-minded people to come along— try GP surgeries, local mental health teams, libraries, churches, schools, post offices, other groups and professionals in the area.
- Design some eye catching posters and let people know about your first meeting.
- Social media (Facebook and Twitter) is easy to use, free and instant. Most people are already familiar with using social media and there are many groups with a dedicated page that you can add to.
- Do not forget word of mouth, personal invitations - there is nothing better than a recommendation!
- Local media, a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, radio and community magazines.
- Community Action Suffolk and Suffolk User Forum both have newsletters you may be able to advertise your group with.



## Step 4 First meeting

- Prepare yourself for the first meeting. Arrive early and have a rough agenda of what you want to cover.
- Think about introductions. Introduce yourself and ask others to do the same. You might want to use an icebreaker such as “if you had a superpower, what would it be?” or you might want to use name stickers.
- The agenda for the first meeting should include setting out some basic boundaries or group rules (see next page).
- Discuss and agree what times and frequency to meet.
- Discuss how you might share experiences.
- Consider what the focus of the group is with the input of others, remember to be flexible and open.
- Think about how you will address any problems within the group.
- Encourage opinions from other people and take time to listen to them.
- You may have temporarily given the group a name - discuss this and agree what the group will be known as going forward. You might want to google search your ideas to make sure no one else locally is using the same name.

## Clarifying group boundaries— a useful exercise

- Using some post-it notes and pens, ask each person to write down individually what boundaries are important to them for the group. One idea or point per post-it note.
- You need to think about confidentiality and data protection at minimum. Respectful behaviour might be another consideration, along with language and commitment.
- Place each of these post-it notes in the centre of the table or stick to a wall for everyone to see.
- Next group the post-it notes by similarity or concern and you will soon see common worries and themes for boundaries.
- Use the themes for further discussion and base your group boundaries around these. Write them down and date.
- Type up the boundaries and give a copy to everyone who attends.
- Review this exercise every 6 months to make sure that they are still fit for the purpose of the group.

