

Workshop: Creating a safe space for peer support	
The material was created by	The Peer Partnership, Denmark
Type of media	Written
Estimate of time	120 minutes
The learning aim for this material	Knowledge • Knowledge of core qualities of peer support • Basic knowledge of trauma and Trauma-Informed Peer Support • Knowledge of approaches to establishing and maintaining relationships with service users and colleagues Skills • Reflect on one's own role and function • Communicate openly and appreciatively about one's own role and function • Validate experiences without imposing interpretations or solutions • Basic facilitation and communication principles Capacities • To select, combine, and evaluate actions in relation to creating safe spaces • To maintain awareness of one's own well-being and working conditions
What type of audience	Peer support workers in training or working.
A short summary of the learning material	The learning material contains a framework for creating a workshop on safe spaces for peer support work. The framework consists of: • Background knowledge • Purpose of the workshop • Workshop agenda • Workshop content • Resources
How to use the learning material in practice	The learning material can be used as a framework for creating a workshop tailored for your organisation. You can use the different elements to implement in your own course playbook.
Theoretical resources	Described in the draft.

Workshop: Creating a safe space for peer support

1. Background:

It is generally accepted that mutual and equal sharing of lived experiences is the fundamental change mechanism in peer support^{i,ii, iii}. However, a prerequisite for these mechanisms to come in action is establishing a safe space for sharing and learning from each other^{iv}.

Furthermore, there is a significant overlap between general principles of collaborative learning and a trauma-informed approach^{v,vi}. Working trauma-informed focuses on roles and boundaries, ensuring that everyone feels safe and can draw on their strengths. Creating safe spaces is therefore a core skill in any peer work.

2. Goals for the workshop:

Knowledge	The workshop participants will get: • Knowledge of core qualities of peer support • Basic knowledge of trauma and Trauma-Informed Peer Support • Knowledge of approaches to establishing and maintaining relationships with service users and colleagues
Skills	The workshop participants will get the ability to: • Reflect on one's own role and function • Communicate openly and appreciatively about one's own role and function • Validate experiences without imposing interpretations or solutions • Apply basic facilitation and communication principles
Capacities	The workshop participants will get the capacities to: • Select, combine, and evaluate actions in relation to creating safe spaces • Maintain awareness of one's own well-being and working conditions

3. Workshop agenda:

1. Welcome and presentation of program – 10 minutes
2. Icebreaker/presentation of participants – 15 minutes
3. Presentation: Core qualities of trauma-informed practices and creating a safe space for peer support – 20 minutes
4. Break – 15 minutes
5. Reflective exercises on creating a safe space for trauma-informed peer support – 45 minutes
6. Rounding up the workshop – 15 minutes

4. Workshop content:

4.1. Core qualities of trauma-informed practices and creating a safe space for peer support ¹ (item three on the agenda)

What creates a safe space	How to create a safe space
Creating safety Ensure physical and emotional security using trauma-informed practices that avoid harm, judgment, or re-traumatization.	a) As a built-in step in a manual, program etc. b) Have participants create a self-care plan during the training.
Trust and transparency	Set clear rules, be consistent, and build trust. A common rule is when discussing traumatic events, it is ok to give enough information to convey the idea but omit graphic details. Create clarity about what is registered and what limits there are to confidentiality.
Maximizing opportunities for choice and control	Ensure all know they are free to choose not to participate in any peer support activity. Remind participants that they are free to leave if they wish.
Fostering connections	Provide opportunities for participants to interact with one another through discussions in pairs or small groups.

¹ https://nasmhpd.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/TIPS-HIV_Trainer_Manual_Final.pdf

Respect, non-judgment, and tolerance for uncertainty	Work through validating all experiences without imposing interpretations or solutions. Offer activities that ask service users to reflect on what they consider important takeaways. Build in opportunities to share knowledge and support participant-led decision-making.
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4.2. Reflective exercises on creating a safe space for trauma-informed peer support (item five on the agenda)

<i>A) Personal Reflections on Role and Function (25 minutes)</i>
<u>Purpose:</u> Help participants become aware of their own role in creating safe spaces.
<u>Instructions:</u> Instruct the participants to individually fill out a template for creating a safe space for peer support (see fig.1 for the template). Afterwards ask participants to collectively reflect on the following questions and write down their answers: • What elements of your role contribute to creating a safe space? • How does your own behavior influence others' sense of safety? • What challenges do you experience in maintaining safety?
<i>B) Case Exercise: Identifying Safety-Promoting Actions (20 minutes)</i>
<u>Purpose:</u> Raise participants' awareness of concrete actions that foster safe spaces.
<u>Instructions:</u> • Present a case where a peer support situation is challenged by a lack of safety (e.g., unclear boundaries or a participant who does not feel heard). • Ask participants to discuss in groups how they could create a safe space in this situation. • Have the groups present their solutions.

Fig.1: template for planning a safe space for peer support

Template for Planning a Safe Space for Peer Support

Use this template to prepare and adapt the framework, principles, and approaches in peer support, with a focus on trauma awareness, safety, choice, and equality.

1. Purpose and Framework

What is the purpose of the session/conversation/group?

E.g. support, mirroring, community...

How will you introduce the purpose and framework to the participants?

E.g. orally, written material, group agreement...

2. Safe Participation

How do you ensure physical and emotional safety?

E.g. room setup, anonymity, breaks, making it clear you can always opt in/out of the process...

How do you account for different needs or boundaries?

E.g. by making space for just listening and not judging, reflective exercises...

Is it clear what will be shared, noted, or documented?

Describe how you inform participants about confidentiality, documentation, or what you intend to write down/not write down.

3. Dialogue and Relationships

How will you encourage equal sharing of experiences?

E.g. talking circles, question-based exercises, sharing personal experiences without giving advice...

How do you create opportunities for connection and connectedness among participants?

E.g. icebreakers, small groups, conversation exercises, collective reflection...

How do you support mutual respect in the group?

E.g. shared ground rules, principles of non-judgment, reflection on one's own role...

4. Self-care and Boundary Awareness

How do you create your own safe space as a facilitator/peer?

E.g. peer supervision, breaks, professional support...

How do you handle it if something reactivates a negative experience or feeling in you?

5. Evaluation and Follow-up

How will you follow up on the experience – with yourself or with the participants?

E.g. survey, closing circle, evaluation conversation...

5. Selected resources:

Recommendations for trauma-Informed approaches in social Interventions with adults (2023). The Danish Agency for Social Affairs and Housing.

[https://www.sbst.dk/Media/638321681543271947/Social-%20og%20Boligstyrelsen%20\(2023\)%20Anbefalinger%20til%20at%20arbejde%20traumebevidst%20i%20den%20sociale%20indsats%20med%20voksne.pdf](https://www.sbst.dk/Media/638321681543271947/Social-%20og%20Boligstyrelsen%20(2023)%20Anbefalinger%20til%20at%20arbejde%20traumebevidst%20i%20den%20sociale%20indsats%20med%20voksne.pdf)

Trauma-informed peer support for people living with hiv

https://nasmhpd.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/TIPS-HIV_Trainer_Manual_Final.pdf

TIPS – Trauma Informed Peer Support

- https://www.nasmhpd.org/sites/default/files/TIPS_Training_2018_NASMHPDTemplate_PPT.pdf
- Part 2 YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OA5ZBPhSsF4>
- Part 3 YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KL57IP5uGdw>

The National Trauma Training Programme (NTP) – Scotland

<https://shorturl.at/XhTgE>

The Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

<https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/six-principles-trauma-informed-care.pdf>

Creating Safe Space practice guide – Scottish Recovery Network.

file:///hosit/dfs/717/redirect/marie.koch/Downloads/CHPS_Practice_Guide_1-1.pdf

ⁱ Chinman M, McCarthy S, Mitchell-Miland C, Daniels K, Youk A, Edelen M. Early stages of development of a peer specialist fidelity measure. *Psychiatr Rehabil J*. 2016 Sep;39(3):256-65. doi: 10.1037/prj0000209. PMID: 27618462; PMCID: PMC5642953

ⁱⁱ Gillard S, Gibson SL, Holley J, Lucock M. Developing a change model for peer worker interventions in mental health services: a qualitative research study. *Epidemiol Psychiatr Sci*. 2015 Oct;24(5):435-45. doi: 10.1017/S2045796014000407. Epub 2014 Jul 3. PMID: 24992284; PMCID: PMC8367355.

ⁱⁱⁱ Watson, E. (2017). The mechanisms underpinning peer support: a literature review. *Journal of Mental Health*, 28(6), 677–688. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2017.1417559>

^{iv} Egmoose, C.H., Poulsen, C.H., Bjørkedal, ST.B. et al. The 'Paths to everyday life' (PEER) trial – a qualitative study of mechanisms of change from the perspectives of individuals with mental health difficulties participating in peer support groups led by volunteer peers. *BMC Psychiatry* 24, 555 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-024-05992-w>

^v McGeown H, Potter L, Stone T, Swede J, Cramer H; Bridging Gaps Group; Horwood J, Carvalho M, Connell F, Feder G, Farr M. Trauma-informed co-production: Collaborating and combining expertise to improve access to primary care with women with complex needs. *Health Expect*. 2023 Oct;26(5):1895-1914. doi: 10.1111/hex.13795. Epub 2023 Jul 10. PMID: 37430474; PMCID: PMC10485347.

^{vi} Sweeney A, Filson B, Kennedy A, Collinson L, Gillard S. A paradigm shift: relationships in trauma-informed mental health services. *BJPsych Advances*. 2018;24(5):319-333. doi:10.1192/bja.2018.29