

Obesity UK Peer Support Group

Creating safety within the peer support group –
Boundaries and why they are important

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Why do we need boundaries?

When we create peer support groups, it is important to keep the space safe and inclusive. As a peer facilitator you will help create and refer to the boundaries (guidelines, rules and limits) everyone within the group can agree on. The boundaries might be affected by different things, such as your role in the group, both yours and others comforts and discomforts, organisation policies and procedures and the law.

Why communication is important

People's understanding of what is and is not acceptable in a situation will have been learnt from many things, such as their relationships, experiences, upbringing, community and culture and may be different to other people's. When it comes to the peer support group, defining and communicating the boundaries is important because:

- Different people will have different understandings of what is and what is not acceptable within a certain situation.
- People might not know the purpose of the peer support group and might expect something else, such as therapy or advice.

Setting firm and flexible boundaries

It is important to consider that some boundaries are firm, whereas others can be more flexible. A firm boundary is one in which the line between acceptable and not acceptable is always the same, such as confidentiality.

Confidentiality means not sharing personal information, stories or who attends a peer support group outside of the group and facilitator team.

Confidentiality is not a boundary that can be negotiated by group members. It enables people to feel and be safe, so that people can build trust and therefore share and connect.

Confidentiality should always be respected unless there is reason to believe there is a risk of serious harm to a person. In which case, relevant information would only be shared with relevant services, such as emergency services.

It is also important to consider how confidentiality can be retained outside the peer support space. Peers within the group may develop friendships, which may involve socialising outside the boundaries of the peer support space and exchanging personal details. Where this happens, it is important to create guidelines about what friends may discuss outside of peer support, to respect the confidentiality and privacy of other peers.

The following resource from the Scottish Recovery Network may be helpful to refer to when thinking about boundaries and confidentiality within and outside of the peer support space: <https://www.scottishrecovery.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Boundaries.pdf>.

Other boundaries can be more flexible and the line between what is acceptable or not may move depending on the situation. An example of this is what you choose to share and not share about yourself within the peer support group.

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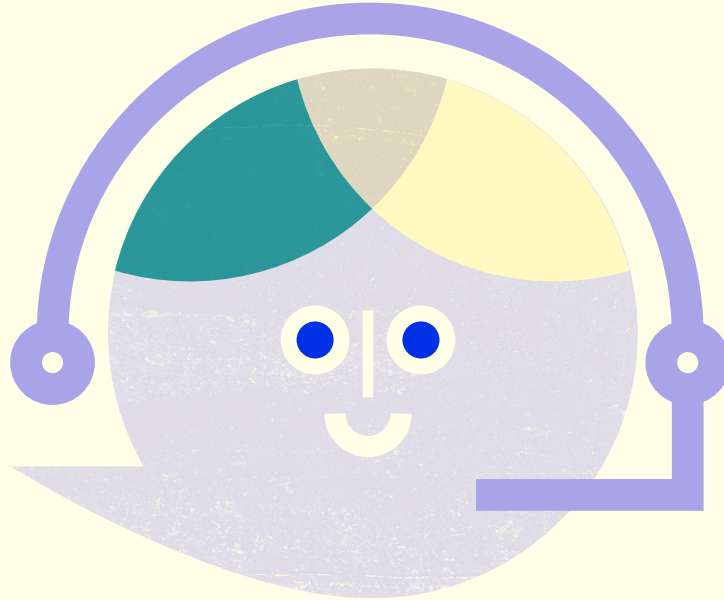
Boundaries and why they are important



Sharing experiences with the group

When sharing with the group, it is important to protect yourself and not over disclose. To help with this, you could ask yourself the following check in questions recommended within the 'Let's Do Peer Group Facilitation' resource from the Scottish Recovery Network: <https://scottishrecovery.net/resources/lets-do-peer-group-facilitation/>:

- Am I ready to share my own lived experience?
- Am I aware of my own triggers and wellbeing?
- Have I thought about how sharing my experiences might affect my wellbeing?
- What am I willing to share to protect myself?
- How can I structure what I share?
- When do I share and when is it not appropriate to share?



How to get in touch

At Obesity UK we are happy to chat with you and answer any questions you may have.

We would be happy to hear your feedback and ideas for this resource.

We can also connect you with other people facilitating peer support groups for people living with obesity.

Please get in touch

Contact us: <https://obesityuk.org.uk/contact/>

Contact us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Obesityuk>