



Guidelines for Virtual Groups

Welcome! Our groups work best when partnered with another form of treatment, not as a first line of treatment. Our volunteer facilitators are not therapists, doctors, or counsellors, and they do not endorse or recommend any medications or specific treatment methods.

Things to Keep in Mind

Before joining, all facilitators and participants of virtual groups are asked to sign a confidentiality form outlining the no-recording policy and private space policy.

We strongly encourage participants to arrive on time as this enhances the experience for everyone and fosters meaningful engagement, sharing of experiences, and valuable peer support. Please note that facilitators are available to provide resources and assistance to those who arrive late, helping them successfully integrate into the session.

If you are attending a group on behalf of a family member, **or** as a friend of a group member, you will be asked to leave. If you are interested in attending a family member peer support group, however, facilitators can provide you with details.

There must be unanimous consent from all group members. If you do not identify personally with the purpose of a group, you may be asked to leave.

If you feel triggered or need to leave at any point during a group you are free to do so. If you feel that you need one on one support that can be arranged for you.

If you are in major distress, you may contact your local hospital or a distress centre hotline. We can provide phone numbers for you.

Do not give advice. Respect that sharing our experiences with others is far more helpful than trying to solve their problems. Feedback should focus on the participant's experience in a supportive manner rather than becoming an opportunity for sharing your own story. As such, use 'I' statements such as: "*I found this worked for me when...*", instead of 'you' statements such as "*I think you should...*"

Maintain confidentiality. Respect the fact that confidentiality is very important to being open and sharing with others. As such, what happens or is said in a group is not to be repeated outside a group. Also, when approaching group participants outside of meetings, please understand that not everyone may wish to engage with you or may not wish to discuss group topics. Note: To protect everyone's privacy and to maintain appropriate boundaries, participants must not share or request contact details such as phone number, home address, e-mail address, or social media account(s).

Acknowledge differences. We respect differences in opinion, gender and sexual orientation, religion, political views, cultures, and ways of communicating, among others. You are welcome to share your pronoun(s) during check-in and include them with your profile name. We do not tolerate discrimination or offensive language. Stereotyping and prejudice of any kind is not tolerated.

Conversational topics. We avoid divisive topics like politics, religion, or sports. It's acceptable to share your feelings on how current events, religion, or your favourite sports team are affecting you. However, we ask that you refrain from quoting religious or political texts specifically. This is because it often results in power inequities that can resemble abusive inequities people have experienced in the past. Our goal is to promote respectful and inclusive dialogue among all participants.

Mindful of sharing details. Please be mindful that sharing details and descriptors of traumatic incidents, including suicide and violence or assault of any nature, can be triggering to group participants and can threaten the safety and comfort of all group participants. As such, the sharing of details and descriptors of traumatic events is not permitted. To maintain group safety and comfort, we ask that you share your feelings around the experience without providing details or triggering information.

Allow everyone to be heard and feel heard. Respect that everyone in a group needs a turn to share and to feel that a group values what they have to say. To foster meaningful discussions, feedback and comments must concentrate solely on the individual's time to share. We may mute your microphone when it is not your turn to share. We encourage you to 'raise a hand' when you would like to speak.

You are always welcome to just sit and listen. When it's your turn to share, you are free to pass and to change your mind.

Following group guidelines. Our facilitators and participants are responsible for following mutually agreed Comfort Agreement and/or Group Guidelines. Facilitators will work to ensure that the Comfort Agreement is being followed by all participants and facilitators. They may take any steps necessary if group guidelines are not being followed or if there is threat to the safety or comfort in a group.

Participants and facilitators are not allowed to attend any group intoxicated. To maintain safety and comfort, intoxicated individuals will be asked to leave a group.

Remember: Physical and verbal abuse are *not* tolerated!