

# Peer networks: what to do when a network member's behaviour disrupts the group

## Introduction

A high functioning peer support network will be a network that works well together. Individuals will get along well together and explore different ideas and views in a constructive way. This will make the network most effective for everyone.

People will have different views and ideas however and sometimes people will disagree with each other. Having disagreements is normal. Some group members may act in ways that disrupt group effectiveness.

This is where the facilitator role comes into play. The main aim is to foster communication among the group and to model effective interaction that members can emulate. Facilitators also provide an example of how to share in the group. It takes skill and practice to do this when a member is misusing the group.

Chris Hampton on the Community Tool box website states that:

*"In dealing with difficult group members, support group facilitators must learn a delicate combination of control mixed with kindness. This sort of assertive caring directly addresses problems with the group without insulting or offending members. You may use assertive caring during a meeting to get the discussion back on track, or you may wish to speak to the member in private after the meeting."*

## Let's make it happen

The Community Toolbox identifies a number of ways that a peer support network member's behaviour may disrupt-use the network. These include:

- When a member is often late to meetings
- When a member talks too much, monopolizing the discussion
- When a member rejects every suggestion that others make - the "yes, but" phenomenon

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- When a member appears to have problems that are more than the group can handle such as someone who's had a change in health and should seek medical attention, or someone who may have psychological problems needing professional attention
- When a member interrupts others or brings up inappropriate or irrelevant subjects
- When a member's problem doesn't match up with what the group is meant to address.

It may be that a member of the network uses language that is out dated or offensive or is particularly frustrated and angry about a particular issue.

The Community Toolbox website and other resources suggest ways to approach the network member:

- ***Speak to the individual in private:*** if you consider that one member's way of doing things is impacting on the effectiveness of the peer network, it is a good idea to say something early in the piece. Do this in private and suggest ways and possibilities to make positive change
- ***Respect the member's position or dilemma:*** State that you understand the reason(s) behind the member's negative behaviour. Use "I" or "we" statements, which show how his behaviour affects you and the group
- ***Set limits:*** Gently but firmly correct the behaviour. Explain your reasons; letting the member know why you need to change the situation will make him more likely to cooperate. It may be helpful to refer to the group rules (See Quick Guide: How rules can help your peer network).
- ***Suggest an alternative:*** Explain what you'd like to see the member do instead of the negative behaviour
- ***Get the member's agreement on the alternative:*** Make sure the member understands what is being asked of him/her and agrees to do it.
- ***Give the member the opportunity to be heard:*** If a member is constantly interrupting, let the member know that they will have an opportunity to be heard and refer to the agreed meeting rules. Make sure you then return to the member later in the discussion and honour your agreement.

## QuickGuide

### Where you can find more information

There are lots of online resources about peer support. The resources below contain information specifically about what to do when a Peer Support network member is being difficult.

Limbs4Life has a comprehensive guide to setting up peer groups and what to do in the event of conflict

[http://limbs4life.org.au/pdf/peer-support/L4L%20Peer%20Support%20Group%20Guide\\_WebVersion.pdf](http://limbs4life.org.au/pdf/peer-support/L4L%20Peer%20Support%20Group%20Guide_WebVersion.pdf)

The Community Toolbox has great resources on its website:

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/enhancing-support/peer-support-groups/main>

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