



SET UP A PEER SUPPORT SYSTEM

**A playbook on
WORKPLACE
MENTAL
WELL-BEING**

What is a peer support system?

It is a support network where employees can provide basic emotional support to one another. Peers can also identify and refer colleagues in distress to professional help.

Why is a peer support system useful?

Employees spend a significant amount of time interacting with each other. As such, co-workers form the first layer of support. Peer support networks strengthen camaraderie amongst co-workers and provide a quick way for employees to reach out.

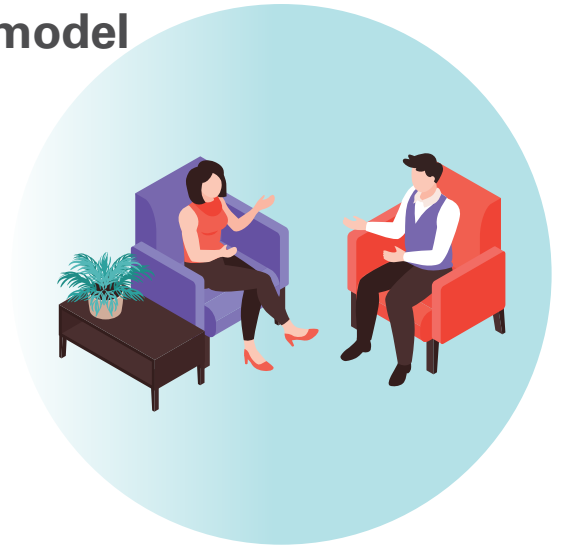


Steps in implementation

1

Select a suitable peer support model

- Buddy System 1:1
 - > Everyone in the organisation can be assigned a buddy.
 - > The role of the buddy is to conduct regular check-ins, provide a listening ear and share advice on managing mental well-being and building resilience.
 - > Buddies are also more attentive to behavioural or emotional changes which makes them a good touchpoint to flag out colleagues who are in distress for professional help.



- Support Groups 1:5
 - > Organisations can also consider forming support groups led by peer support leaders.
 - > The peer support leaders' role is to create a safe space for colleagues to share their experience in overcoming challenges and that "It's Okay to Reach Out".
 - > Peer support leaders can also take the lead in practising simple exercises and mindfulness during the sessions.
 - > Cap membership for each support group at five if possible, and appoint more peer support leaders if necessary.



- In-house Helpline
 - > While many employees may be accustomed to being physically present when assisting a colleague in distress or when seeking help, there are instances where employees may be off-site, e.g. working from home, dormitories or other care facilities.
 - > Employers can consider in-house care channels such as a dedicated helpline for their employees to call for emotional support and advice.





- Setting up an in-house helpline:
 - > Management support is crucial. Ensure that management is committed and prepared to dedicate resources to address the issues highlighted by employees.
 - > Provide different platforms to meet employees' help-seeking preferences (e.g. one-to-one sessions, video calls, email and messaging platforms such as WhatsApp).
- Raise awareness of the helpline and its confidentiality policy
 - > Ensure that helpline operators are briefed on the various dedicated channels to seek help should there be a need for professional advice, counselling or medical attention.
 - > Form a peer consultant group for helpline operators to check in on themselves and ensure their personal well-being.
 - > See **Annex** for useful tips on managing the helpline.

2

Appoint and recognise peer support leaders/helpline operators

- Peer support leaders should be (i) willing; and (ii) capable
 - > Peer support leaders should be selected on a voluntary basis, usually those who are passionate about helping others.
 - > Supervisors may also encourage individuals to be a peer support leader. Some suitable traits are compassion, empathy, mental resilience and affability.
- Ensure a diverse representation of peer support leaders, e.g. across seniority levels, departments and language groups.
- Communicate expectations on being a peer support leader before obtaining their commitment. The peer support leader should have the option to step down from the role at any point, if needed.
- Peer support leaders and helpline operators' appointments should be formalised and recognised in their performance appraisals.





3

Train peer support leaders and helpline operators

- Peer support leaders and helpline operators should attend training* to be equipped with peer supporting skills. They should understand that mental well-being lies along a continuum, ranging from healthy to at-risk to unwell. Organisations should establish clear escalation protocols on when and where to refer their colleagues for professional help.
 - > A general rule is to refer colleagues to professional help if they display the following signs for more than two weeks:
 - Unusual difficulty in getting work done.
 - Withdrawing from close family, friends and colleagues.
 - Relying on alcohol and sedatives.
 - No longer doing things that they enjoyed.
 - Unable to concentrate.
- [WSH Council's Total WSH Programme](#) offers organisations free access to mental well-being talks and workshops.
- For organisations which are able to dedicate more resources to supporting employees' mental well-being, consider hiring trained counsellors. These trained counsellors can spearhead the peer support system within the organisation.

* Organisations can tap on [Health Promotion Board's WOW Programme](#) to train peer support leaders



4

Dedicate time and space for employees to approach peer support leaders

- Start by introducing peer support leaders to employees. As part of the introduction, peer support leaders can consider:
 - > Arranging for meals or tea breaks with the group or in smaller settings.
 - > Emphasising that “It’s Okay to Reach Out”
 - > Sharing self-care techniques and platforms to seek professional help.
- In subsequent engagements, organisations can consider setting up:
 - > Conducive and dedicated spaces within the office for sessions to take place.
 - > Regular timeslots during office-hours for check-ins.

5

Provide support for the team

- It is crucial that peer support leaders have an avenue and circle of support to check in on themselves and ensure their personal well-being e.g. peer consultant group.
- HR leaders can facilitate timely debriefs with the peer support leaders to hear concerns, exchange ideas, resources, tips, and techniques.

Annex: Useful tips for manning the helpline



Be calm:

One of the ways to relax and be calm is to focus on breathing before providing emotional support to others, or anytime when feeling signs of distress.

Create a safe space:

Wearing headphones improves the clarity of your audio and also assures your fellow colleague that no one else is listening in. Switching off the fan or removing other ambient noises helps too.

Limit your distractions:

Give your colleague your undivided attention by focusing on the conversation and putting aside all other tasks.

Listen actively:

Listen actively to build trust and rapport, and allow your colleague to feel heard and understood. Avoid giving judgment. Respect your colleague's experience and perspectives.

Have an open discussion:

Offering support through phone or video calls allows immediate benefits such as convenience and safety, but miscommunications may arise from being physically distant from each other. Clarify often as humour and tone may be misinterpreted.

Acknowledge your limits:

At times, the challenges or distress experienced by your colleague may go beyond your ability to provide support. It is okay to seek help when that happens. If necessary, encourage your colleague to seek assistance from a professional.

Have a back-up plan:

Technical disruptions may happen despite our best efforts. At the start of the call, discuss with your colleague about what you would do if the session is disconnected, e.g. continuing with a phone call or text.

HOW SOME HAVE DONE IT

SECTOR: Media

What they did:

In-house group of trained guides and advisors to help employees with mental well-being

How they did it:

- Identified key personnel across teams with the ability and interest to support their colleagues' mental well-being
- Provided training to these employees on their role as "listening ears"
- Established quarterly meetings to discuss challenges and successes

Key ingredients for success:

- A strong business case for adoption, e.g. address high attrition of employees due to poor mental well-being
- Recognition from CEO or senior management helped to motivate volunteers
- Match employees with the right person - employees in need were allowed to choose the person they wished to talk to, and were encouraged to do so from outside their own departments

"In my organisation, creating these peer support groups or "The Circle of Support" as we call it, eventually contributed to a culture of openness. Colleagues were more supportive and empathetic to one another. We are not afraid to ask for help and offer assistance when needed. Over time, strong bonds were formed and we look forward to work each day"

– HR Manager, Manufacturing Company

"Regular communication about this initiative in our Town Halls and meetings helped to spread the word and practical solutions to problems were shared by employees"

– Talent Leader

This booklet is part of the series
of initiatives from

A playbook on WORKPLACE MENTAL WELL-BEING

Contact Us

For more information and support on workplace mental well-being initiatives, you can visit Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council's website at **www.wshc.sg/mentalwellbeing**.

The resources in this playbook are not exhaustive. Should you wish to feature or share your company's mental well-being practices and learnings, please contact WSH Council through the above website.

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