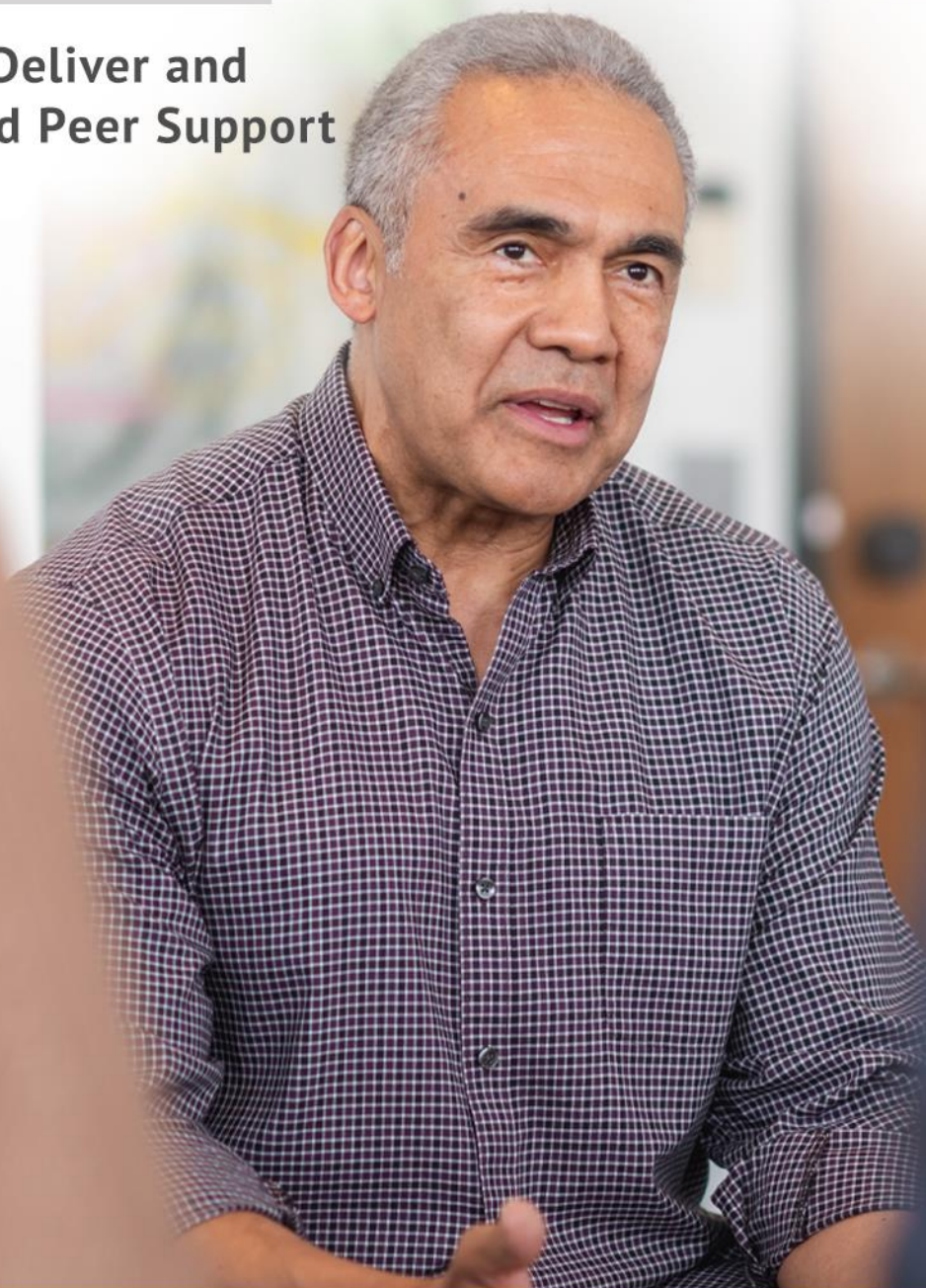


After Stroke Peer Support Toolkit



A Guide to Develop, Deliver and
Maintain Group-based Peer Support



SECTION **5**

Facilitator's Guide

After Stroke Peer Support Toolkit

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Disclaimer

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Conflict of Interest Declaration

The contributing members have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Using the Facilitator's Guide

This section includes information on how to guide peer support group discussions and manage common challenges. It includes:

- Information on preparing for the role of a peer group facilitator.
- Tips to improve participation, deal with arguments and sensitive issues.
- Helping members with communication challenges.
- Resources on living with stroke, and peer support.

What is the Role of a Facilitator?

A facilitator is the member of the peer support group responsible for:

- Creating a safe and welcoming space where members feel comfortable to share.
- Inspiring discussion by asking clarifying and follow-up questions.
- Keeping discussions on track
- Encouraging members to help and support each other.
- Modeling good group behaviour.
- Managing difficult members and conversations.

One or more persons can take on this role, or a group can rotate the role among the members.



Tip: A facilitator is a guide, not a leader. Everyone in the group is equal.

What Skills Should a Facilitator Have?

To effectively guide a discussion, a facilitator should be:

- A guide who supports group members.
 - Warm, empathetic, unbiased, and a good listener.
 - Should not impose their opinions on members.
 - May share own story where relevant to support discussions.
- Must be confident and assertive to keep discussions on track.
 - Accountable and dependable.
- Understand the value and importance of their role.
 - Dependable and consistent in their involvement (constant turnover can lead to low trust and poor group dynamics).

How to Prepare to be a Facilitator?

Training is important to prepare any facilitator for their role. Check if your partner organizations have their own or preferred peer support training course. They may also know other peer support facilitator training programs. Volunteers can also seek out accredited training or certification courses provided by external reputable organizations.

You should have some basic understanding in four areas:

- Understanding What Happens After a Stroke.
- Peer Support.
- Reflective Learning.

What is Peer Support?

A facilitator should know and understand the value of peer support, how it works, and what peer support looks like. These resources can help you understand more about peer support.

Resource Name	Description	Link
6 Ways Peer Support Can Improve your Health (Heart and Stroke Canada)	A list of six reasons that peer support is a useful tool.	https://www.heartandstroke.ca/articles/6-ways-peer-support-can-improve-your-health
Value of Peer Support (NESTA UK)	A case study about Steve, a peer support group leader since 2016.	https://www.nesta.org.uk/case-study/stroke-association-peer-support/
Code of Conduct (Peer Support Canada)	A one-page list of 'I will' statements that facilitators should agree to.	https://peersupportcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Peer_Support_Code_of_Conduct-ENG.pdf
Values, Principles and Ethics of Peer Support (Canadian Mental Health Association)	An overview of the core beliefs that peer support is based on.	https://cmhawselfhelp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Values-principles-and-ethics-of-peer-support-v180926.pdf

Understanding What Happens After a Stroke

The following resources can help you get a basic understanding of what happens when someone experiences a stroke.

Resource Name	Description	Link
Effects of Stroke (American Stroke Association)	An 11-page resource about the effects of stroke.	https://www.stroke.org/en/about-stroke/effects-of-stroke
Effects of Stroke (Stroke Association UK)	A 10-page resource on emotional changes, memory, neuroplasticity, relationships and more after stroke.	https://www.stroke.org.uk/effects-of-stroke
Getting on With the Rest of your Life After Stroke (Canadian Stroke Network)	A 36-page resource that covers goal setting, exercise, blood pressure, stress and more. Also includes activities to help with brain health.	https://www.strokebestpractices.ca/-/media/1-stroke-best-practices/mood-cognition-and-fatigue/getting-on-with-the-rest-of-your-life-after-stroke.ashx

What is Reflective Learning?

Some meetings might not go as well as you planned, and others might go well. Once the session is done, think about what you did or would like to do differently.

Some simple questions can help with reflective practice:

- How did today's session go?
- What could have been better?
- What should we do next time?

Resource Name	Description	Link
Reflective Practice (Campus Mental Health)	Reflective journal questions and reading about reflective practice.	https://campusmentalhealth.ca/toolkits/campus-peer-support/supervision-support/reflective-practice/

How Do I Keep Discussions on Topic?

When the discussion steers away from the topic at hand, the easiest way to redirect is to point out that conversation is getting off-topic. Use gentle but firm language when communicating this. If there is time after the meeting for casual conversation, members can discuss it then. Creating a public ‘parking lot’ where off-topic ideas are listed can be helpful, so members can remember their important but off-topic items for the end of the meeting or future sessions.

A useful phrase is: “This is not within the topic for our meeting today. Let’s write it down and come back to it in another session or discuss after the meeting.”

How Do I Manage Stalemates and Arguments?

Sometimes members may start arguing with no signs of coming to an agreement. Try to calm the situation and remind the group that members do not need to agree with each other and that everyone can have their own opinion or idea. If there is tension, try a grounding or breathing exercise to change the energy of the meeting. If helpful, review the core values and rules of peer support and remind participants to have a respectful discussion.

How Do I Manage Disruptive Members?

If you have members who frequently speak over other members, interrupt, or side-track the discussion, the facilitator can step in. To avoid putting the member in an uncomfortable position, talk to them one-on-one.

Remind them to wait for their turn or raise their hand. Let them know that others need some time to talk too. You can also use tricks like – “the person with the blue stick speaks”, provide notepads to jot down thoughts and ideas while waiting for their turn, or saving time to highlight one member each session to give them time to share their thoughts.

How Do I Manage Discussions about Sensitive Topics?

When guiding a peer support group, even the best facilitators encounter challenges. Here are some suggestions on how to prepare for and/or respond.

Some group members will find certain topics emotional or sensitive. If you think that a topic may make some members upset, gently inform members ahead of time. Members may then choose not to attend or come mentally prepared. Reach out to these members separately to see if they need any assistance. You could also discuss with your groups on what topics they would like to avoid.

If a sensitive topic is brought up unexpectedly, the facilitator can call for a break. During this time, privately ask affected members if they would like to step out. The facilitator can also ask the group to move the topic to a future meeting. Remind members to feel free to step away at anytime if the discussions are making them uncomfortable.



Tip: Do not avoid topics that may be uncomfortable. As hard as they may be, some conversations are especially important. For many members, this group may be the only place they can talk about their fears and concerns openly.

Approach these topics with empathy and sensitivity.

What Should I Do if I'm Worried About a Member's Wellness?

Your approach will depend on the type of crisis you experience.

- If there are red flags or concerning behaviour.
 - Speak to the member privately and recommend that they get in touch with their local healthcare professional. Share any appropriate resources you may have.
- If there is a medical emergency.
 - Call the local emergency service followed by the member's emergency contact. Complete an incident report.

How Can I Get Participants to Trust Me?

As a facilitator you can gain the trust of members by:

- Asking appropriate questions – let members know you are listening and interested.
- Remaining calm and neutral but empathetic and understanding.
- Sharing your own experiences (selectively and with intention).
- Being patient, objective and fair.
- Staying committed and consistent – remain involved, and committed to support the members. Sometime developing trust just needs time.

How Can I Support Members with Communication Disorders (Like Aphasia)?

After a stroke, people may experience challenges with communication (like aphasia), and may have difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding what other people say. This does not mean that they are less intelligent!

Help them feel respected.

- Make eye contact.
- Use an adult tone of voice.
- Speak to them directly, naturally, and kindly. Don't shout.
- If you need to speak on their behalf, ask them if it's okay first.
- Acknowledge their frustration and be patient.
- Say supportive phrases, like "I know you know".

Help them understand you.

- Bring markers and paper or a portable whiteboard.
- Speak clearly & slowly. Pause frequently and use short sentences.
- Write large key words and draw or point to things.
- Use your hands and face to show what you mean.
- Focus on one topic at a time.
- Let them see your lips.

Help them communicate.

- Ask yes and no questions, one at a time.
- Give them time to answer.
- Don't complete their sentences (unless asked).
- Give them choices to point to (yes, no, I don't know, etc.).
- See if their face or actions are saying something.
- If they say the wrong word, imagine what they may be trying to say.

Double-check:

- Check what you think they have told you. Say it again or sum it up.
- Ask if they have more to tell you, before moving on.
- Sometimes, ask "Should we take a break? Can we try again later?"



Tip: This is just a brief summary. Learning how to support people with aphasia in conversation is like learning a new language. It takes practice! We strongly encourage facilitators to take extra training in this area.

Resource Name	Description	Link
Does Your Family Member Have Aphasia?” (Aphasia Institute)	The above suggestions are adapted from this resource.	https://tbrhsc.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Does-your-Family-Member-Have-APHASIA.pdf
Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia (Aphasia Institute)	A communication method that uses a set of techniques to encourage conversation when working with someone with aphasia.	https://www.aphasia.ca/communication-tools-communicative-access-sca/
Aphasia - What a Difference Some Help Makes (Dyscover)	A 5-minute video demonstration of supportive communication strategies.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWVoqM9jmeM
Accessible Information Guidelines (Stroke Association UK)	A 32-page resource on how to make information accessible for people with aphasia.	https://www.stroke.org.uk/sites/default/files/accessible_information_guidelines.pdf1_.pdf

How Can I Improve Member Engagement?

- **Ask questions to let your members know you are actively listening.**
 - Use open ended questions like “Can you tell us more about...”
 - Use techniques like ‘person holding the ball speaks’ to bring attention to the speaker.
 - Ask members to face the speaker.
- **Minimize distractions.**
 - Make sure people can see each other without needing to move.
 - Provide comfortable seating in a safe and private space.
- **Allocate plenty of time for discussions, questions, and answers.**
- **Add movement.**
 - Include safe and fun physical activities, like seated ball throwing, feet tapping, drum circles etc.
 - Music and body movements cause the release of endorphins.
- **Discuss different topics.**
 - Do not limit meetings to only stroke related topics. Include time for general topics about life, recent movies or books, hobbies, travels/adventures, etc.

How Can I improve Involvement and Attendance?

- **Make it easier for them to attend.**
 - Ask members what you can do to encourage attendance.
 - Regularly check if the meeting time and place works
 - Have a virtual meeting option if the weather is bad, if transportation is challenging, etc.
 - Offer reminder phone calls.
 - Make wellness check phone calls if members miss a few sessions.

- **Involve members in decisions about the peer support.**
 - Encourage members to provide feedback about the group.
 - Discuss ways to improve how the group runs.
 - Involve members in discussing future topics, guest lectures, events, etc.

- **Mix things up.**
 - Occasionally, have meetings where you DO NOT discuss stroke or challenges.
 - Watch a movie or a play, play games, visit a gallery or museum.
 - Have a potluck, bingo night, go for a hike etc.

How Can I Prepare for Virtual Peer Support Meetings

If you decide to host virtual meetings (either entirely or in addition to in-person meetings), you will need to prepare for different challenges and opportunities.

- **Technical Issues.**
 - Be prepared for technical issues (poor connectivity, bandwidth issues, device issues, etc.).
 - If needed teach members how to use chat, reactions, raise hands, enter, and exit breakout rooms.
 - Have a volunteer watch the chat and help members with any difficulties.

- **Use the Virtual Features.**
 - Offer members an option to remain anonymous by turning off their video or using a pseudonym.
 - Ask members to raise hands when they want to speak.
 - Encourage the use of chat. That way other members can share thoughts without interrupting the person speaking.

- **Security and Safety.**
 - Request that participants attend the meeting through a secure and private internet connection.
 - Use waiting room or passcode features. The meeting link should be private and not shared with anyone else.
 - Reserve a session to talk about online safety.
 - Do not give participants permission to share screen freely.

- **Increased Structure.**
 - Virtual groups may need more structure to ensure that members get a turn to speak, discussions stay on-topic, and stay engaged.
 - Include breaks to give facilitators a chance to debrief and discuss activities.

- **Emergency Planning.**
 - Have a plan to manage crises and/or emergencies.
 - Keep a record of member contact information, and emergency contacts so you can send help if necessary.
 - Prepare an action plan for supporting members who are experiencing distress or need help.



How Can I Help Members Connect With Each Other Online?

- **Review values and group rules.**
 - Remind members about confidentiality and respect.
- **Spend more time getting to know each other.**
 - Prepare introduction questions that aren't stroke related.
 - Try fun questions like favourite cookie, place to travel, and recently watched movies.
- **Include team building and bonding activities.**
 - Use polling or reactions to get a sense of likes and dislikes.
 - Do a show-and-tell of a unique object in their home.
 - Encourage members to turn on their videos (if comfortable).
- **Retain some informality.**
 - Invite people to bring their lunch, dinner, or drinks to the session.
 - Include breaks during and after the session for u conversations.
 - Share fun information, or interesting stories during breaks.

Resource Name	Description	Link
Remote and Online Peer Support (National Survivor User Network)	A 19-page resource about virtual peer support, written during Covid-19.	https://www.nsun.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Remote_and_Online_Peer_Support_Resource.pdf

Other Helpful Resources

These are additional resources for you to refer to or share with your group members, as required.

Resource Name	Description	Link
After Stroke Program (March of Dimes Canada)	A website that provides information about programs accessible to Canadians impacted by stroke. It includes programs on skill redevelopment, peer support, movement, speech, and communication, and more.	https://www.afterstroke.ca/
Your Stroke Journey (Heart and Stroke Canada)	A 120-page resource that covers all parts of your stroke journey from understanding what happened, to the first weeks and moving forward into your new normal.	https://www.heartandstroke.ca/-/media/pdf-files/canada/your-stroke-journey/en-your-stroke-journey-v20.ashx
Guide for Stroke Recovery (Toronto Stroke Networks)	A website that covers what to expect, taking your medications, managing changes, improving your overall health, and reducing your risk of another stroke.	https://www.strokerecovery.guide/
Stroke Recovery (National Health Service UK)	Understanding difficulties after stroke, including swallowing, driving, paralysis, mental health and more.	https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stroke/recovery/

<p>Life After Stroke (American Stroke Association)</p>	<p>A 36-page resource about how to adapt to life after a stroke, including diagnosis, early treatment, and rehabilitation.</p>	<p>https://www.stroke.org/-/media/Stroke-Files/life-after-stroke/Life-After-Stroke-Guide_7819.pdf</p>
<p>Peer Supporter Competencies (Peer Support Canada)</p>	<p>A two-page list of competencies for peer support facilitators.</p>	<p>https://peersupportcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Peer_Supporter_Competencies-ENG.pdf</p>
<p>Guidelines for Practice and Training of Peer Support (Mental Health Commission of Canada)</p>	<p>A 54-page toolkit that covers the guidelines for peer support and suggestions for training.</p>	<p>https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Guidelines-for-the-Practice-and-Training-of-Peer-Support.pdf</p>
<p>Planning Accessible Events (Accessibility Services Canada)</p>	<p>A booklet with low-cost and no-cost things you can do to make your event more inclusive to people who live with disabilities.</p>	<p>https://accessibilitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Planning-Accessible-Events-May-2016.pdf</p>