



## THINK: Peer support

[Watch our video about Peer support \(https://vimeo.com/1086710679\)](https://vimeo.com/1086710679)

**Purpose of this section:** This section explores whether your service provides, or connects women to, peer support opportunities that reduce isolation and build confidence.

**Who should complete it:**

- ▶ Frontline staff: Think about how you signpost to peer networks or help create informal support links.
- ▶ Managers: Review whether peer involvement is embedded in service design or evaluation processes.

**Tip:** If your organisation doesn't currently offer peer support or feels it's not relevant to your delivery model, you can signpost women to organisations who provide opportunities for peer support (see [inclusive resources and signposting \(https://equallysafe.sclld.org.uk/toolkit/inclusive-resources-and-signposting-9/\)](https://equallysafe.sclld.org.uk/toolkit/inclusive-resources-and-signposting-9/) for details), record this and reflect on possible future developments or partnerships.

## Women with learning disabilities' experiences of peer support

The trauma experienced by victim/survivors with learning disabilities cannot be overstated. Gender-based violence can be an extremely isolating experience for women with learning disabilities. The feeling of being misunderstood can worsen those struggles.

This is why they often find support in addressing their trauma by meeting with other women who have shared similar experiences to them in peer support groups.

By offering opportunities for connection, understanding and hope, peer support can bridge the gap and become a lifeline for women with learning disabilities.

Peer support can help women with learning disabilities who have experienced gender-based violence in several ways. It can:



- ▶ reduce isolation
- ▶ encourage friendships
- ▶ dispel myths perpetrated by violent partners
- ▶ provide ongoing support and social contact
- ▶ validate lived experience
- ▶ provide opportunities for self-determination
- ▶ develop daily living skills
- ▶ provide a safe and confidential space to share experiences and learn from each other
- ▶ support managing challenges and adversity
- ▶ empower women with learning disabilities to recognise their own expertise and improve self-confidence, through the opportunity to provide support to others in similar situations to their own

This is what some women with learning disabilities have said about peer support:

“It’s good to have a group(s) of women, friends who are safe and you can talk to them.”

– Member of People First (Scotland)’s Equally Safe Group, 2024

“I feel better when I am busy with my wee groups. I feel better when I have my groups to go on, on Zoom. I’m not thinking about it all. There was a week there when I didnae have any groups on, and I felt I was going back the way.”

– Woman with a learning disability, SCLD, 2023

## What does good peer support look like?

Peer support is a values-based approach to supporting people with similar lived experiences to come together and offer each other mutual help and support. It is often informal and based on shared understanding but can also be offered as structured peer support groups or initiatives.



“Ideal peer support for me would just be folk to talk to and links or suggestions of where we could go for support – just to be given an idea of who we can turn to confidentially.”

– Member of People First (Scotland)’s Equally Safe Group, 2024

## What makes peer support unique?



The Scottish Recovery Network advises that good peer support has these [four essential components](https://scottishrecovery.net/peer-support/what-is-peer-support/) (<https://scottishrecovery.net/peer-support/what-is-peer-support/>) :

- ▶ Shared lived experience which builds trust and empathy
- ▶ A mutual relationship of equals where people walk alongside rather than ‘fix’
- ▶ A supportive relationship based on hope and belief
- ▶ An intentional space where people explore together and work towards recovery



Done well, peer support creates an environment where people can feel safe, understood and accepted by nurturing an atmosphere of non-judgmental support, openness and personal growth.

Whether through one-on-one support or in a group setting, peer support provides a unique opportunity for people to speak openly about their struggles with others who truly understand.

Peer support also plays a crucial role in fostering recovery and wellbeing. By sharing experiences, peers can break down feelings of isolation and stigma which are often barriers to seeking help.

By offering practical advice, support and reminding individuals they are not alone in their journey, peer support can be an empowering part of their recovery.

It may be that your organisation only supports a small number of women with learning disabilities. In these situations, it might be helpful to invite women with learning disabilities to join your own mainstream support groups. The benefit of this is that they can share their experiences and get support from other women who have experienced gender-based violence. The challenge is to ensure that these groups have the capacity to include women with learning disabilities.

Another option would be to signpost them to organisations who offer peer support to women with learning disabilities.

You can find out more about peer support here. (<https://scottishrecovery.net/peer-support/what-is-peer-support/>)

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