



# Guidelines



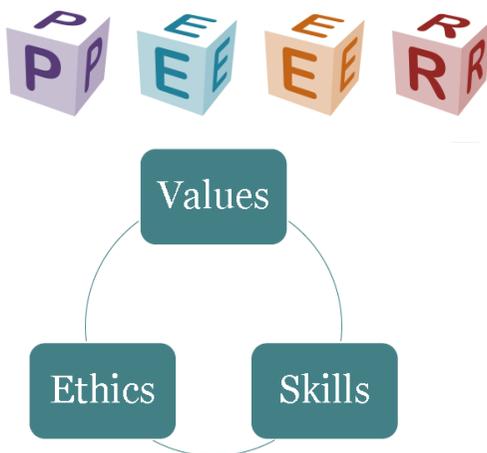
November 2017



## BRIO Peer Support Guidelines

A BRIO Peer Support worker is a person who uses his or her lived experience, plus skills learned in formal training, to support others through their similar life experiences.

This does not necessarily mean that the Peer Support worker is free from all problems, but does imply that they are capable of effectively managing their lives and can participate in practices that support self-care, health, and overall well-being.





## Personal and Professional

Peer workers in BRIO have the task of walking carefully along the track where personal and professional meet. The use of lived experience and knowledge in the Peer Support relationship means the boundaries are broader and more flexible than in traditional professional boundaries. This requires the peer worker to be able to negotiate the boundaries on a person by person basis.

Peer workers have a personal approach in the relationship – they have shared many of the experiences of the people they are now supporting and often can relate through these commonalities. Peer Support workers have built on these commonalities by the work they have undertaken in BRIO. This work equips them with increased understanding, clearer insight and skills, so they can work with professionalism.

The Peer Support relationship is not a relationship of equal power: It is not solely a supportive friendship. Even though peer-based support relies on minimizing the power/status difference and the social distance between the helper and those being helped, one person in this relationship enters with increased vulnerability requiring the objectivity and support of the other.

Peer Support workers need to be able to identify potential risks and to be aware of how to reduce risks to peers and others. Peer workers may have to manage situations, in which there is intense distress and may need to work to ensure the safety and well-being of themselves and other peers.

They need to be competent in:

- Recognising signs of distress and threats to safety among peers and in their environments
- Providing reassurance
- Creating safe spaces when meeting with peers
- Taking actions to address distress or a crisis by using knowledge of local resources, treatment, services and support preferences of peers.



## Empowerment

BRIO Peer Support workers can inspire hope and demonstrate the possibility of recovery. They are role models for wellness, responsibility, and empowerment. Peer Support is rooted in the knowledge that 'hope is the starting point from which a journey of recovery must begin.'

BRIO Peer Support workers are often better able to identify and engage hard-to-reach individuals. By providing a practical approach they can support people who want to make changes in their lives. The nature of these changes is led by the individual and their specific needs.

This may include:

- Exploring what the person hopes for their future and translating these hopes to specific goals
- What resources and services are available
- Helping peers to investigate, select, and use needed and desired resources and services
- Accompanying peers to community activities and appointments when appropriate

This shared approach can play an important empowering role in reducing stigma - both public stigma and self-stigma. Stigma held by the general public towards women in recovery is often associated with avoidance, discriminatory practices, withholding help, coercive treatment, and segregated institutions. Self-stigma involves the internalised negative beliefs (associated with addiction or criminality) which impact on a person's identity and self-image. It can negatively affect self-esteem, relationships, as well as a woman's ability to pursue meaningful life goals and/or engage in effective treatment. The most effective way to reduce stigma is through direct, personal contact – exactly where the BRIO Peer Support workers are placed.



## Educated in self-care

BRIO Peer Support workers will need to have:

- An ability to detect when their own stressors or triggers may be resulting in unhealthy or unwanted attitudes or behaviours, together with a willingness to ask for help and/or take steps to work towards recovery
- A personal commitment to self-care through stress management and resiliency strategies to maintain health and wellbeing
- A recognition that each peer whom they support will need to find their own unique approach to self-care (so knowing not to impose their own ideas or ideals)
- A commitment to ongoing development and training, which may include:
  - Networking of Peer Support workers to share knowledge and experiential learning, and, most importantly keep each other committed and consistent with the principles and values of BRIO;
  - Information and knowledge about available supports to connect and/or refer to;
  - Co-facilitating groups with other staff, bringing their lived knowledge to such groups and developing their understanding and skills of group facilitation;
  - The opportunity for debriefing, with an appropriate mentor/person (without jeopardising confidentiality);
  - Ongoing self-care;
  - Attending /participating in further events to learn additional skills;
  - An environment that includes people who are good supports that validate them, increase hope, and decrease isolation.



## Rooted in Relationship

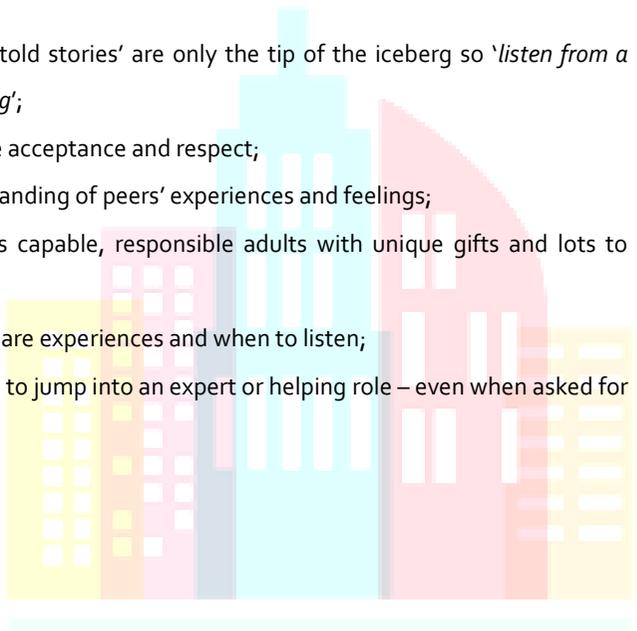
A healthy relationship is the foundation on which Peer Support is provided.

A Peer Support worker draws from their experiential knowledge—the happenings, emotions, and insights of their personal lived experience—as they listen to, speak about, interact with and support peers. This authenticity results in greater feelings of empathy and connectedness with the Peer Support worker.

Peer relationships benefit both helper and person being helped. Peer Support workers often facilitate their own recovery and deepen their sense of resiliency and self-efficacy as they pursue meaningful work and make a positive impact on others.

Peer Support workers will need to be competent in interpersonal skills:

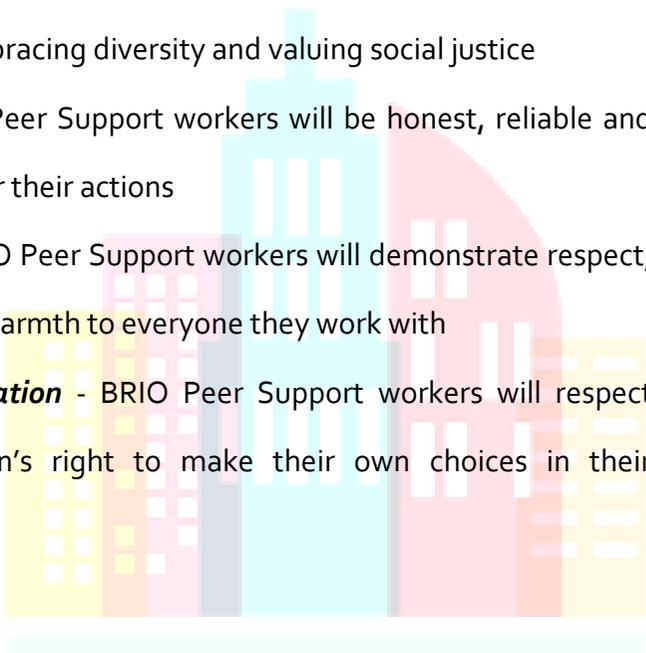
- Be able to listen with careful attention to the content and emotion being communicated;
- Remember that our 'told stories' are only the tip of the iceberg so '*listen from a position of not knowing*';
- Demonstrate genuine acceptance and respect;
- Demonstrate understanding of peers' experiences and feelings;
- Regard each other as capable, responsible adults with unique gifts and lots to contribute;
- Recognise when to share experiences and when to listen;
- Resist the temptation to jump into an expert or helping role – even when asked for help or advice.



Relationship between the Peer worker and Peer  
has at its core the following values, highlighted by our Acronym:

### LISTnRS

- **Lifelong learning** - BRIO Peer Support workers will understand that we are all involved in a lifelong task of personal and professional development.
- **Integrity** - BRIO Peer Support workers will be authentic in their work, using their lived experiences to convey empathy and warmth
- **Social inclusion** – BRIO Peer Support workers work from a position of embracing diversity and valuing social justice
- **Trust** - BRIO Peer Support workers will be honest, reliable and accountable for their actions
- **Respect** – BRIO Peer Support workers will demonstrate respect, kindness and warmth to everyone they work with
- **Self-determination** - BRIO Peer Support workers will respect another person's right to make their own choices in their journeys





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