

Peer Support & Education

What is peer support and education?

In the context of mental health, peer support and education means getting information and support from another person who has been diagnosed with a mental health condition, received mental health services, or has had experiences that are typically labeled as mental health symptoms.

Participating in peer support and education can be an important part of managing your wellness, and help you find comfort and community with people who have shared a similar journey.

Who is peer support and education for?

Peer support and education is for anyone who is dealing with experiences that are typically labeled as mental health symptoms, whether or not they have received a mental health diagnosis.

Some options are open to anyone, while other options are tailored to people who are a certain age, have had a particular experience, or have received a specific diagnosis. There are also peer support options for people who are experiencing a crisis.

What does peer support and education look like?

Peer support and education comes in many forms. Find what works best for you!

Peer Support Groups

In a peer support group you can share your experiences, and get empathy and validation from fellow participants. Peer support groups are led by facilitators who have also dealt with experiences that are typically labeled as mental health symptoms. Most groups are drop-in, meaning you can start attending at any time and attend as long as you need. Although people may share resources and strategies, the main focus is on mutual support.

what veteran facilitators say about peer support groups...

- peer support groups give you an opportunity to be yourself and not feel judged for it
- you can bring whatever you're experiencing to the group - good or bad - and be supported in it
- it feels good to be with others who "get" you - even if their experiences are not exactly the same
- you can build relationships and find community within a support group
- each group is different - you can try more than one and find what works for you

Peer Education Programs

Peer education programs are structured, time-limited programs where participants can learn about wellness strategies, crisis planning, goal setting, and more. Peer education programs are led by teachers who have also dealt with experiences that are typically labeled as mental health symptoms. Although people get support from teachers and fellow participants throughout the program, the main focus is on learning.

what veteran teachers say about peer education programs...

- attending a peer education program is a great way to “jump start” your wellness
- you can learn so much from other participants - and they, in turn, from you
- the relationships that you build within the program are as important as the information covered

One-on-One Peer Support

One-on-one peer support is a combination of support and mentoring, with a focus on building relationships. People in peer support roles have also dealt with their own experiences that are typically labeled as mental health symptoms. Often called Peer Specialists, Peer Mentors, or Peer Advocates, they bring their own experiences to the role.

what veteran peer supporters say about one-on-one peer support...

- peer support can help you feel like you're not alone in your experiences
- the most important part of what we do is the relationships we build
- we're here to listen, empathize, validate, and be a sounding board
- we can share ideas from our own experience - but only if that's helpful to you

How can I find peer support and education?

There are a lot of options for getting peer support in Massachusetts!

NAMI Massachusetts

NAMI Massachusetts offers free peer support groups and education programs for anyone who is dealing with experiences that are typically labeled as mental health symptoms.

NAMI Connection Support Groups

<https://namimass.org/nami-connection-recovery-support-groups/>

NAMI Peer-to-Peer Classes

<https://namimass.org/nami-peer-to-peer/>

Recovery Learning Communities

Recovery Learning Communities (RLCs) are groups of people who have come together to support one another. They are open to anyone who is dealing with experiences that are typically labeled as mental health symptoms. They offer free peer support groups, one-on-one support, education programs, and more. RLCs also offer “community bridging,” support for people who are transitioning from the hospital to the community.

Central Mass Recovery Learning Community at the Kiva Center

<https://kivacenters.org/>

Metro Boston Recovery Learning Community

<https://www.mbrlc.org/>

Northeast Recovery Learning Community

<https://www.nilp.org/nerlc/>

Southeast Recovery Learning Community

<https://www.southeastrlc.org/>

Western Mass Recovery Learning Community at the Wildflower Alliance

<http://www.westernmassrlc.org/>

Young Adult Access Centers

Young Adult Access Centers offer resources for for young people through age 24. The centers help young adults build skills for independent living, learning, and employment, and offers opportunities for peer support and mentoring.

Impact Youth Access Center in Springfield

<https://gandaracenter.org/impact-youth-access-center/>

Mill You Drop In Center in Lowell

<http://www.speakingofhope.org/access-centers/>

STEPS Young Adult Resource Center in Arlington

<https://www.waysideyouth.org/aboutus/ourservicesoverview/services/young-adult/steps-young-adult-resource-center/>

TEMPO Young Adult Resource Center in Framingham

<https://www.waysideyouth.org/aboutus/ourservicesoverview/services/young-adult/tempo-young-adult-resource-center/>

Transition Resources & Community Supports (TRACS) in Braintree

<https://www.aspirehealthalliance.org/our-programs/for-young-adults-teens/life-skills/>

You Forward Drop In Centers in Haverhill and Lawrence

<http://youforward.org/>

YOUnity Drop In Center in Gloucester

<https://jri.org/node/556>

Zia Access Center in Worcester

<https://ziacenter.com/>

Peer Support Warmlines

Warmlines are numbers that people can call to get support when they are feeling lonely, anxious, sad, or simply need someone to talk to. They can also provide resources to callers.

Boston Peer Support Line

<https://www.mbrlc.org/peer-support-line>

1-877-733-7563

available Monday - Sunday, 4 - 8 pm

Western Mass Peer Support Line

<http://www.westernmassrlc.org/peer-support-line>

1-888-407-4515

available Monday - Thursday, 7 - 9 pm & Friday - Sunday, 7 - 10 pm

Alternatives to Suicide Support Groups

Alternatives to Suicide support groups run by and for people who have had past suicide attempts or have thoughts about suicide. During the groups, people share their successes and their challenges, provide support, and share ideas for coping with difficult life circumstances. The Alternatives to Suicide model was created by the Western Mass Recovery Learning Community (RLC). Groups are offered by the Western and Central Mass RLCs, and in other community locations.

Alternatives to Suicide at the Western Mass Recovery Learning Community

<http://www.westernmassrlc.org/alternatives-to-suicide>

Alternatives to Suicide at the Central Mass Recovery Learning Community

<https://kivacenters.org/peer-support/phone-online/>

Hearing Voices Support Groups

Hearing Voices support groups are for people who hear voices, see visions, negotiate alternative realities, or experience other non-consensus phenomena or beliefs. They offer people an opportunity to connect, share experiences, and find mutual support. Groups meet in person and online.

Hearing Voices Support Groups at the Western Mass Recovery Learning Community

<http://www.westernmassrlc.org/hidden-community-happenings-fix/888-online-and-phone-supports-march-2020>

Hearing Voices Support Groups at the Central Mass Recovery Learning Community

<https://kivacenters.org/peer-support/phone-online/>

Find other Hearing Voices Support Groups

<http://www.hearingvoicesusa.org/find-a-group>

Depression Bipolar Support Alliance

The Depression Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) offers information and support for people dealing with mood disorders, and others impacted by them.

Find a local DBSA support group

<https://www.dbsalliance.org/support/chapters-and-support-groups/find-a-support-group/>

Find a virtual DBSA support group

<https://www.dbsalliance.org/support/chapters-and-support-groups/online-support-groups/>

Other Online Support Options

Daily Strength

<https://www.dailystrength.org/>

7 Cups

<https://www.7cups.com/home/>

Support Groups Central

<https://www.supportgroupscentral.com/>

The Tribe

<https://support.therapytribe.com/>

Department of Mental Health

The Department of Mental Health (DMH) offers opportunities for peer support for people enrolled in their community-based programs and people staying in DMH-operated inpatient facilities.

Peer-Led Crisis Alternatives

Peer-led crisis alternative programs are a support option for people dealing with a crisis, or to help prevent times of crisis.

Afiya in Northampton

<http://www.westernmassrlc.org/afiya>

Karaya in Central Massachusetts

<https://kivacenters.org/>

Peer to Peer Program in Quincy

<https://www.aspirehealthalliance.org/our-programs/for-adults/peer-to-peer-program/>

The Living Room in Framingham

<https://www.advocates.org/services/livingroom>

The Living Room in Springfield

<https://www.bhninc.org/services-and-programs/emergency-services/living-room>

The Living Room in Greenfield

<https://www.csoinc.org/community-based-programs>

More Options

Looking for more peer support? Contact COMPASS! The COMPASS Helpline at NAMI Massachusetts provides information and resources to help people navigate the mental health system. We can help you identify peer support options and more.

COMPASS Helpline at NAMI Massachusetts

<https://namimass.org/nami-mass-compass-helpline/>

call 617-704-6264 or 1-800-370-9085

email compass@namimass.org

Monday through Friday, 9 am - 5 pm (excluding holidays)



This information is for educational purposes only. Contact the COMPASS Helpline at NAMI Massachusetts for additional information and resources.

call COMPASS at 617-704-6264 or 1-800-370-9085

email COMPASS at compass@namimass.org