



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Waterloo Wellington



SELF HELP &
PEER SUPPORT

What to Expect from Self Help & Peer Support Services

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, we have been providing peer support through video and telephone, as well as in-person individual peer support session when possible. We look forward to being able to offer in-person groups again in the future, once it is safer to do so in our spaces. This document helps you to know what to expect when you reach out for virtual group support and in-person one-to-one support from Self Help & Peer Support services (SHPS).

What is peer support? Is it counselling or therapy?

Peer Support is emotional support that is based on a common experience –in our case, it is support based on common lived experience of mental health and/or addiction challenges. It is **not** counselling, nor is it therapy; it is not treatment, nor is it clinical assessment. You do not need a formal diagnosis to attend. Peer support is not advice-driven. Rather, peer support is a ‘fellow traveller’ approach to mental health and addiction care. Facilitators and participants (peers) share parts of their journey/story –what it’s like for them, what has and has not worked for them –in creating the life they want. Mutual relationships are created and nurtured, isolation and stigma are decreased, and a sense of community and self-empowerment are built.

Who can join SHPS services?

Our services, including the majority of our groups, are available to people who are 18 years of age and older, who live in the Waterloo Wellington regions (including Guelph, Cambridge and Kitchener), and who also identify as living with a mental health and/or addiction challenge. We ask that all participants adhere to our SHPS Code of Conduct when accessing services.

How do I access SHPS virtual services?

Access to virtual Self Help & Peer Support services happens in one of two ways: by e-mailing us at selfhelpgroup@cmhaww.ca, or by telephoning one of our three sites, depending upon your preference. To reach us by phone, please call the site closest to where you live, and leave a message with your first name and phone number:

- Kitchener: 519-570-4595
- Cambridge: 519-623-6024
- Guelph and Wellington County: 519-763-4014

A staff Facilitator will return your call or e-mail, usually within 24 hours. As someone with their own lived experience with mental health and/or addiction challenges, this staff peer supporter will answer your

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questions, offer you an orientation to our services, and/or provide you with information around joining one of the many virtual support groups we offer each month. To see what virtual groups are currently on offer, you'll find the current calendar on our website at <https://cmhawsselfhelp.ca/events/>

How do I access SHPS in-person services?

Currently, our groups continue to be virtual only. One-to-one peer support is a short-term option, virtually and also in-person. Virtual one-to-one peer support happens by telephone or video, and in-person one-to-one can be arranged at one of our sites (see above). One-to-one peer supporters are skilled in their own mental health and/or addiction recovery; take a 'fellow traveller' approach to supporting you; and maintain confidentiality of your conversations, within legally-determined boundaries (boundaries that will be discussed with you at the start). One-to-one peer support conversations are focused on identification and exploration of recovery goals, as defined by you. **Enrolment (registration) with SHPS services and attending at least one group are required to access one-to-one peer support.**

Currently SHPS offers scheduled individual peer support sessions in-person, to people attending at least one virtual group, at three locations:

- 67 King St E Kitchener
- 9 Wellington St Cambridge
- 147 Wyndham St N. Guelph

To access in-person peer support sessions you can email selfhelpgroup@cmha.ca or call one of our sites. To reach us by phone, please call the site closest to where you live, and leave a message with your first name and phone number:

- Kitchener: 519-570-4595
- Cambridge: 519-623-6024
- Guelph and Wellington County: 519-763-4014

In-person peer support appointments are generally 30 minutes. As a healthcare agency we take Covid precautions seriously and anyone accessing in-person peer support sessions will be asked to adhere to our screening, masking, and physical distancing guidelines. If you have a mask exemption, please notify staff ahead of time.

Is there a fee to use SHPS services? Can I join anonymously?

One to one peer support and our virtual groups are available, free of charge, and some kind of registration is required when you first contact us. The kind of group registration required depends on the kind of group you wish to join –'drop-in' or 'enrolled.'

To join a 'drop-in' group, we ask for your first name and either an email or phone number with which we can contact you. Once we have these two pieces of information, you are welcome to join any other 'drop-in' group, without further registration. Your attendance is not recorded, unless you make a specific request to have it recorded. ***If you would like to ask that your attendance be recorded, please speak with one of our facilitators when you first begin attending.***

To join an 'enrolled' group (this includes our Recovery Learning and Spark of Brilliance groups), registration is a bit more involved. During a phone call (*not through email, as email is not considered a secure way to send detailed personal information*), you will be asked for your full name, date of birth, gender, and mailing address. This personal information is then stored in a secure database and you are thereby enrolled in our services.

When can I join SHPS?

There are no wait lists to access the majority of SHPS services. You are able to join a drop-in group right away. In contrast, there may be a waitlist to join a Recovery Learning or Spark of Brilliance group, due to these groups having start and end dates and the reality of limited available resources.

You can join a drop-in group any time and attend as often as works for you. In contrast, regular attendance is required for Recovery Learning groups, due to the use of a curriculum that builds session to session and to enable the development of peer relationships as participants get to know one another. Attendance at a Spark of Brilliance workshop for which you have registered is required, as spaces are limited and requests frequently outnumber available spaces.

How do I join a virtual group? Is there a limit to the number of virtual groups I can join?

When you decide to attend a virtual group, e-mail selfhelpgroup@cmhwww.ca, or call one of our sites (see above for the different site telephone numbers), and tell us in which group or groups you are interested. There is no limit on the number of groups a person can join.

Do virtual groups happen through Zoom?

Virtual group participation is by telephone or video, depending upon your preference, using Microsoft Teams –a platform similar to Zoom, but more secure, to protect participant privacy and ensure confidentiality of group conversations. You will be given the specific connection details for each group once you contact us and a number of orientation documents, including one that walks you through how to use the Microsoft Teams platform.

What happens during a virtual group session?

When you first contact us, you will be sent five orientation documents, including this one, that will help you prepare for participation in virtual peer support. *Please read them before attending your first group.*

When you join in on a group session, you'll be welcomed by the group facilitator who, whether volunteer or staff, has their own lived experience with the group theme. You'll hear our group guidelines. Depending on the group, you may be invited to 'check in' with your first name and how you're doing that day or how you're doing in relation to the group theme. For example, in *Self Compassion*, the facilitator may ask how you have practiced self compassion since the previous session. You are always welcome to 'pass' on check-in if you'd rather not share. You will be encouraged to participate in a way that is comfortable for you and the group.

Non-judgemental emotional support (listening, making space for emotions, and validating participants' experiences) is an important part of the culture of all of our virtual groups. Beyond this, the content and process of the group depends on whether it is a 'Peer Support' group or a 'Recovery Learning' group.

Peer Support groups focus on sharing experiences related to the theme –for example, in *Anxiety, Depression, and Hope Peer Support*, participants share how they're dealing with anxiety and depression, what has or hasn't worked for them, and what they do to nurture a sense of hope. Participants are encouraged to share what they are dealing with in their lives, in keeping with the group's theme and with being trauma-informed (explained further below). **Recovery Learning groups** are also peer support, but also have an educational and skills-building component –for example, in *Good Mindful Morning* group, participants read and discuss an article or excerpt from a workbook, or watch a video, in order to learn mindfulness skills, as well as share their experiences with mindfulness.

Towards the end of group, participants will often be invited to do a 'check out' to give feedback on how the group went, but, again, you are welcome to 'pass' if you'd rather not share. You'll be thanked for your attendance, and welcomed to return.

What is 'trauma-informed' sharing in a group?

You'll notice that one of our group guidelines says, '*When talking about your experiences, avoid going into specific details that may trigger other group members.*' The experience of trauma is common among people with mental health or addiction challenges. We strive to create environments in which participants can share about their struggles, yet in ways that do not traumatize or re-traumatize themselves or other participants. Achieving this means that we do not share details of traumatic experience; rather, we talk about the emotions that arise, not the events themselves. Similarly, our February, 2022

groups can be a safe place to talk about suicidal thoughts –as long as participants do not share details of self-harm or suicide attempts, and as long as no one in a particular session is in active mental health crisis. *Again, focusing on feelings, rather than detailed actions, promotes healing while avoiding traumatizing oneself and others.* We also ask that participants turn off their camera when eating, smoking, or vaping, and to avoid stigmatizing language like ‘fat,’ ‘obese,’ ‘schizo,’ and so on –all so that we can create environments that are as emotionally safe as possible, for as many participants as possible.

What other services does SHPS have?

Depending on your situation, you may also wish to connect virtually with our **Entrepreneurship Facilitator**, who supports individuals in setting up their own business. If you enjoy creativity, check out our **Spark of Brilliance** workshops on our current virtual group calendar, designed to nurture recovery and self-discovery through the arts. The type of workshops offered changes from month to month, and the number of spots is limited for each workshop. Registration is required, through selfhelpgroup@cmhaww.ca or by calling one of our sites (see above for site addresses and phone numbers).

What if I have further questions?

We are happy to answer your questions! Email selfhelpgroup@cmhaww.ca or call one of our sites at a number listed above, and you’ll hear back from someone usually within 24 hours.

Self Help & Peer Support: Join in! We’re ready when you are.