
Peer Supporter Handbook

Welcome, Supporters!

Session Structure

Each session can be broken down into **6 clear phases**:

1. **Opening & Consent Check**
 2. **Setting Expectations & Boundaries**
 3. **Active Listening & Exploration**
 4. **Validation & Empathy**
 5. **Closure & Encouragement**
 6. **Resource Sharing & Safety Check (if needed)**
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1. Opening & Consent Check

Goal: Help the user feel welcomed, respected, and in control.

What to do:

- Greet the person warmly and by name.
- Ask for consent to continue:
“Hi [Name], I’m here to listen. Is it okay if we talk now?”
“Just checking — are you comfortable chatting here for a bit?”

Why it matters: It builds trust and reminds them they’re in control of the session.

2. Setting Expectations & Boundaries

Goal: Clarify your role as a **peer**, not a professional.

What to say:

“Just so you know, I’m not a therapist — I’m here as a peer, to listen and support however I can. If at any point you feel unsafe or overwhelmed, we can pause or I can help you find additional support.”

Why it matters: This protects both the supporter and the user, and prevents confusion about what you can (and can’t) offer.

3. Active Listening & Exploration

Goal: Give space for the user to share what’s on their mind.

Supporter Role:

- Ask open-ended, gentle questions:
“What’s been on your mind lately?”
“Can you tell me a bit more about that?”
- Use *reflective listening*: repeat or paraphrase what they say to show understanding:
“It sounds like you’ve been feeling really overwhelmed and stuck lately — is that right?”

Tips:

- Let them lead the conversation.
 - Avoid interrupting or giving advice.
 - Don’t jump to solutions — **focus on understanding**.
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4. Validation & Empathy

Goal: Help them feel seen and accepted in their emotional experience.

Helpful phrases:

“That sounds incredibly difficult. I’m really sorry you’re going through that.”
“It makes sense that you feel this way — anyone would in your shoes.”
“Thank you for trusting me with this. That takes a lot of courage.”

What not to say:

- “At least...”
- “You should just...”
- “Try not to think about it.”

5. Closure & Encouragement

Goal: End the session gently and positively, so they don't feel dropped or dismissed.

How to close:

"I'm really glad we got to talk today. You've shared a lot, and I just want you to know I'm here for you."

"Would it help to check in again sometime soon?"

"Is there anything else you'd like to share before we wrap up?"

Encouragement examples:

"You've done something really brave by opening up today."

"You're not alone, and I hope you keep reaching out when you need to."

6. Resource Sharing & Safety Check (If Needed)

Only if signs of distress, harm, or risk are present.

Do this if they express:

- Suicidal thoughts
- Self-harm
- Feeling unsafe or unstable

Steps:

- Acknowledge their pain.

- Gently refer them to **emergency resources**:

"I'm really concerned about your safety. I want to make sure you get the support you need. Can I help you find a crisis line or emergency service?"

U.S. Examples to share:

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** – Call or text 988
- **Crisis Text Line** – Text HOME to 741741

Do not:

- Try to "talk them out of it" or take responsibility for their safety.

- Offer your personal contact information.
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Final Notes for Supporters

- Keep sessions **peer-focused, non-directive, and compassionate**.
- Don't feel pressured to solve problems — being present is powerful.
- Take care of yourself after sessions; support can be emotionally draining.
- If you feel overwhelmed or unsure, reach out to your app's moderator or admin team at psychiapp@outlook.com.