



Online Peer Support: *How it works*

Research & Evidence Base

Safe, anonymous, 24/7 support from
a global community of students.





What is peer support?

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- ✓ Peer support is an accessible, efficient and ethical way of supporting people's mental health at scale. It can complement traditional mental health services, which are generally effective but only reach a portion of people¹
- ✓ Peer support is based on the important premise that the meaning of recovery can be different for everyone and that people can benefit tremendously from the sharing of experiences, being listened to and respected, being supported to find meaning in their experiences and a path to recovery that works for them, ultimately enabling them to lead a fulfilling and satisfying life.²
- ✓ Peer support isn't something new. It has been commissioned for decades as a complement to traditional support, for those who cannot or do not want to access those services, and its benefits are wide ranging and well evidenced.

¹ What Works for Improving Mental Health, American Council on Education, 2023

² World Health Organisation, Peer Support Mental Health Services Promoting Person Centred and Rights Based Approaches, 2021



What is peer support? (Cont.)

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- ✔ We have transformed peer support by bringing it online, where it can reach anyone who might need it. A core part of our social mission is to remove barriers to accessing mental health support including unaffordable costs, waiting lists, clinical thresholds for entry, geographical constraints, and stigma to accessing support. We combine this with 24/7 real time moderation, world class safeguarding and clinical risk escalation.
- ✔ Online peer support doesn't replace traditional support, instead it wraps around existing mental health and wellbeing provision. It is the service between the services; accessible before a mental health issue is apparent, between therapy sessions, and to support keeping well/relapse prevention after any treatment.
- ✔ Available at any time of the day or night, it is there for those that are not ready for, are waiting for, or do not want traditional services, even where available.



What is peer support? (Cont.)

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The value of peer support is recognised by mental health teams internationally

- ✓ UK policy has recommended that statutory mental health organisations provide peer support as a means of improving recovery outcomes ([Department of Health, 2012](#)).
- ✓ In the USA, the Biden–Harris administration has pledged to transform ‘how mental health is understood, accessed, treated, and integrated—in and out of health care settings’; their recommendations include expanding access to peer support and enhancing its quality ([The White House, 2023](#)).
- ✓ New Zealand’s Mental Health Commission has produced the [‘Peer Support Workforce Paper 2023’](#) highlighting the critical role of peer support in enabling recovery, improving hope and in transforming the landscape of mental health and addiction services.





Online Peer Support *Latest Research*

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Studies show promising results regarding the effectiveness of online interventions, especially for symptoms of anxiety and depression and for training of social functioning.

Effectiveness of Online and Remote Interventions for Mental Health in Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults After the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis

[\(Fischer-Grote et al. 2024\)](#)



A digitally enabled peer support program was effective in addressing loneliness, depression, anxiety, and health-related quality of life among a diverse population of adults with loneliness.

Digitally Enabled Peer Support Intervention to Address Loneliness and Mental Health: Prospective Cohort Analysis [\(Bravata et al. 2023\)](#)



A digital peer support intervention enhanced 4 components of psychological well-being (mattering, a sense of self, self-compassion, and mindfulness) and reduced depression and anxiety symptoms in young people aged 19–25, with sustained benefits beyond the intervention period.

A Digital Peer Support Platform to Translate Online Peer Support for Emerging Adult Mental Well-being: Randomized Controlled Trial [\(Yeo et al. 2023\)](#)



Online Peer Support *Latest Research*

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Peer-driven and web-based suicide prevention services may add an important element of suicide prevention services for adolescents and young adults in rural settings.

Health Needs for Suicide Prevention and Acceptance of e-Mental Health Interventions in Adolescents and Young Adults: Qualitative Study ([Blatter et al 2022](#))



Participation in 'Depression Connect' contributed to a sense of belonging, emotional growth, self-efficacy, and empowerment. The online community primarily served as a virtual meeting place to practice (social) skills for deployment in the offline world. It also allowed the members to learn from each other's knowledge and experiences and explore newly gained insights and coping skills.

A Newly Developed Online Peer Support Community for Depression (Depression Connect): Qualitative Study ([Smit et al. 2021](#))



Young people participating in a 12-week unstructured digital mental health intervention experienced significant reductions in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Evaluation of ReachOut.com, an Unstructured Digital Youth Mental Health Intervention: Prospective Cohort Study ([Kahl et al. 2020](#))



Online Peer Support *Latest Research*

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An online intervention reduced depressive symptoms among Black college men, through addressing mental health, manhood, and social support.

An Online Behavioral Health Intervention Promoting Mental Health, Manhood, and Social Support for Young Black Men: The YBMen Project ([Watkins et al. 2020](#))



Online peer support provides a critical, ongoing role in providing social connection for people with a lived experience of mental ill-health and their carers, especially for those living in rural and remote areas.

Social Connection and Online Engagement: Insights From Interviews With Users of a Mental Health Online Forum ([Smith-Merry et al. 2019](#))



Digital mental health interventions are effective for improving depression, anxiety, and psychological well-being among college students.

Digital Mental Health Interventions for Depression, Anxiety, and Enhancement of Psychological Well-Being Among College Students: Systematic Review ([Lattie et al. 2019](#))



Online Peer Support *Latest Research*

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People with mental disorders report benefits from interacting with online peer support from greater social connectedness, feelings of group belonging and by sharing personal stories and strategies for coping with day-to-day challenges of living with a mental disorder.

The future of mental health care: peer-to-peer support and social media ([Naslund et al. 2016](#))



77% of the posts on a moderated depression platform outlined positive emotional, cognitive, or behavioural changes, emphasising the value of social support.

An Online, Moderated Peer-to-Peer Support Bulletin Board for Depression: User-Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages ([Griffiths et al. 2015](#))

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