

FREE your FEELS GUIDE ON:

HOW TO START A MENTAL HEALTH PEER-TO-PEER WELLNESS GROUP

FOR MIDDLE OR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

This document provides a comprehensive guide to starting a mental health peer-to-peer wellness group for middle or high school students. It covers the benefits of such groups, necessary preparations, objectives, budgeting, activities, a one-year implementation timeline, and strategies for sustainability.

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WHY PEER-TO-PEER (P2P) GROUPS ARE HELPFUL

Peer-to-peer mental health groups offer numerous benefits to both those offering support and those receiving it:

- **Reduced Stigma:** They help reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues by normalizing conversations around mental health.
- **Increased Support:** Students receive emotional and social support from peers who understand their experiences.
- **Improved Mental Health Literacy:** These groups increase awareness of mental health issues and available resources.
- **Enhanced Coping Skills:** Participants learn coping strategies and self-care techniques from each other.

PREREQUISITES /READINESS

$$(R = MC^2)$$

To ensure a successful launch of a P2P group, schools/communities should evaluate their readiness using the **R = MC² formula**. This framework can help schools and communities identify strengths and potential gaps before implementing wellness initiatives.

This formula, developed by Scaccia et al. (2015), breaks down organizational readiness (R) into three components:

- **M (Motivation)**: Willingness to implement the activity.
- **C (Capacity - General)**: Infrastructure, leadership, culture, and resources.
- **C (Capacity - Activity-Specific)**: Skills and tools needed to implement the activity.

Prerequisite Checklist for Launching a P2P Wellness Group :

Before launching the group, ensure the following components are in place:

- **School Approval**: Obtain approval from school administration and align the group with school policies.
- **Adult Ally/Allies**: Identify supportive personnel (teacher, specialist, paraprofessional, etc.) who will:
 - Meet monthly with FYF TA team
 - Help define goals and peer needs
 - Support planning with youth co-leaders
 - Manage paperwork and evaluations
 - Attend all peer-to-peer (P2P) meetings
- **Safe Space**: Secure a safe, confidential meeting space for the group.

- **Training for Facilitators (Adult Ally & Youth Co-Leaders):** Ensure that facilitators can/will receive proper training in mental health support and group facilitation.
 - Adult Allies → Mental Health Essentials for Mentors
 - Youth Co-Leaders → Mental Health Essentials for Student Leaders

- **Curriculum:** Use a district-approved SEL curriculum; integrate FYF materials as supplements.

- **Student Interest (General and Peer Leaders)**
 - General: General student interest – no more than 12 students – to attend and participate in the group
 - Co-Leaders: Identify two students who express interest in being trained as co-peer leaders. This student will undergo training, lead peer-to-peer meetings, and serve as a mentor and a resource to other students in the school.

- **Guidelines and Policies:** Clear policies and guidelines should be established to ensure the program runs smoothly and safely, and that confidentiality is prioritized.
 - Parental Consent: Obtain parental consent for student participation; required for minor participants
 - Confidentiality agreement: Completed by students; consider integrating with parental consent form
 - Co-Leader Agreement: Signed document outlining their role, commitments, and stipend details
 - Program Guidelines: Clear policies on participation, safety, and confidentiality
 - Referral Pathway: Adult allies should have a clearly defined system for escalating cases needing individual mental health support

GROUP OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of the peer-to-peer wellness group include the following. However, this will vary depending on the community's specific, identified needs as determined by youth and adult allies:

- **Providing Emotional Support:** Create a supportive environment where students can share their experiences and feelings.
- **Promoting Mental Health Awareness:** Educate students about mental health issues and resources.
- **Developing Coping Skills:** Teach practical coping strategies and self-care techniques.
- **Building Community:** Foster a sense of belonging and community among participants.

BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS

Starting a peer-to-peer wellness group involves some budget considerations:

- **Training Costs:** Allocate funds for facilitator training programs.
- **Materials:** Budget for educational materials, handouts, and activities.
- **Refreshments:** Provide snacks and drinks for meetings.
- **Meeting Space:** If not provided by the school, consider costs for renting a meeting space.

EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES

Here are some activities that can be included in the wellness group in addition to standing P2P support:

- **Discussion Circles:** Facilitated discussions on various mental health topics.
- **Mindfulness Exercises:** Guided mindfulness and relaxation techniques (i.e. Inner Explorer).
- **Self-Expression:** Creative activities like drawing, painting, or crafting to express emotions.
- **Guest Speakers:** Invite mental health professionals to speak on relevant topics.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Year 1 Timeline

- Month 1-2: Planning and Preparation
 - Secure school approval and parental consent.
 - Arrange meeting space and materials.
- Month 3: Launch
 - Hold the first group meeting.
 - Introduce group objectives and guidelines.
- Month 4-6: Initial Phase
 - Conduct regular meetings (weekly or bi-weekly).
 - Focus on building trust and rapport among members.
 - Identify and train 2 co-peer facilitators/leaders.
- Month 7-9: Mid-Year Review
 - Evaluate group progress and gather feedback.
 - Adjust activities and objectives as needed.
- Month 10-12: Consolidation
 - Continue regular meetings.
 - Plan end-of-year activities and celebrations.
 - Prepare a report on the group's impact and outcomes.

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

To ensure the long-term success of the wellness group:

- **Ongoing Training:** Provide continuous training and support for peer facilitators.
- **Community Partnerships:** Establish partnerships with local mental health organizations for resources and support.
- **Regular Evaluation:** Conduct regular evaluations to assess the group's effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.
- **Funding:** Seek grants and donations to support the group's activities and materials.
- **Student Leadership:** Encourage student leadership and ownership of the group to maintain engagement and continuity.

RESOURCES:



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



Students helping students

At a growing number of colleges, students are helping their peers with mental health concerns and raising awareness of the need for care



Behavioral Health &
Wellness Program

University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus
School of Medicine

DIMENSIONS:
Peer Support
Program Toolkit