Peer Support for People with Personality Disorder

A Peer and Clinician Co-Facilitated Group Program

Participant Workbook
Project Air Strategy acknowledges the major support of the NSW Ministry of Health. The Project works with mental health clinicians, consumers and carers to deliver effective treatments, implements clinical strategies supported by scientific research and offers high quality training and education.

Contact us at info-projectair@uow.edu.au or visit https://www.projectairstrategy.org

Peer Support for People with Personality Disorder: A Peer and Clinician Co-Facilitated Group Intervention – Participant Workbook


The Project Air Strategy for Personality Disorders acknowledges the clinicians and researchers who assisted in the development process (Nicholas Day, Elizabeth Huxley, Kate Lewis, Denise Meuldijk and Caitlin Miller).


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Session One: Introduction to the Peer Support Group Program

About the Peer Support Group Program

The Peer Support Group Program was developed to help individuals with lived experience of BPD who are interested in participating in Peer Support Groups in the capacity of a group member or a peer facilitator.

The program is a co-facilitated program where the support group is co-led by a peer facilitator (an individual with lived experience and recovery of BPD) and a mental health clinician.

The program aims to help individuals with BPD to:

- Improve individual group members’ capacity to manage their symptoms and improve functioning
- Provide individuals with BPD a safe space for sharing experiences with others
- Provide evidence based psychoeducation and skills development
- Provide opportunities for support including group members and facilitators learning from each other
The Peer Support Group Program is a 10 week structured program with a set topic for discussion each week.

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<th>Session</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Objectives of the psychoeducation component</th>
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<td>Introduction to the Peer Support Group Program</td>
<td>- Introduction of facilitators and group members</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Build rapport between facilitators and group members</td>
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<td>- Identify the goals of the Peer Support Group</td>
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<td>- Be aware of the group rules and expectations of group members</td>
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<td>- Foster a sense of safety in the group environment and rapport with other group members</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>What is Personality Disorder</td>
<td>- Understand the diagnostic criteria for BPD and how it develops (biopsychosocial model)</td>
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<td>- Identify health services and schemes which can be accessed for assistance for personality disorder</td>
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<td>Understanding Triggers and Planning for Wellness</td>
<td>- Learn about the differences between triggers and warning signs</td>
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<td>- How to identify triggers and warning signs</td>
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<td>- Develop a sensory box</td>
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<td>- Discuss tools participants may use to keep themselves well</td>
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<td>- Develop a wellness plan</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>- Develop an understanding of the role of emotions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Normalise the experience of many individuals with BPD who experience intense and rapidly changing emotions</td>
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<td>- Identify emotions and how they affect others and you</td>
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<td>- Learn about managing emotions</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>- Identify different types of relationships</td>
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<td>- Recognise challenges in balancing needs of self and others and maintaining healthy boundaries in relationships</td>
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<td>- Develop an understanding of effective communication including assertive communication, and how to apply this to different relationships</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Identity, Beliefs and Values</td>
<td>- Explore the concepts of identity, beliefs, and values</td>
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<td>- Develop understanding of factors that influence identity, beliefs, and values</td>
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<td>- Establish the importance of self-reflection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Increase capacity for self-reflection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Initiate process of identifying individual values</td>
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<td>- Develop understanding of barriers to living out values</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Strengthen motivation to put values into action</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Self-Care and Self-Compassion</td>
<td>- Develop understanding surrounding concepts of self-care and self-compassion</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Establish the importance of self-care and self-compassion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Highlight that the process of self-care and self-compassion will be unique for each individual</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Wellness and Recovery</td>
<td>- Develop understanding of what wellness and recovery personally means</td>
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<td>- Highlight the possibility of recovery</td>
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<td>- Identify the importance of goal setting</td>
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<td>- Develop SMART goals for wellness</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Special Topics</td>
<td>- Review topics group members have expressed interest in</td>
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<td>- Reflect on the take home messages from the program</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Review of Program Sessions</td>
<td>- Review topics group members have requested</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Reflect upon group process and experiences</td>
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<td>- Reflect upon the benefits and challenges associated with attending the group program</td>
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## Structure of Group Sessions

Group sessions are two (2) hours in duration, where each session in the program follows a similar structure. This provides consistency and security for group members.

Each session consists of six parts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the Group Session</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grounding, Mindfulness and Relaxation Exercise</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections of Previous Session and Group Member Sharing</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Short Break</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoeducation and Skills Development</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debrief and Grounding/Mindfulness/Relaxation</td>
<td>10 minutes</td>
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NB: In session one, the sharing component is also replaced with an icebreaker activity.
# Group Rules and Expectations of Group Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <em>What is discussed in the room, stays in the room</em>: Maintain confidentiality, therefore what is discussed in group should not be repeated or shared with others beyond the group</td>
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<td>2. <strong>Talk about yourself and your experiences.</strong> Share feelings and experiences. Avoid giving advice or trying to ‘fix’ another group member’s problems. Although sharing is encouraged, it is not compulsory.</td>
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<td>3. <strong>It is the group’s job to make the group work:</strong> Arrive on time, participate, and try to attend for the duration of the session and program. Show respect towards the facilitators and follow their instructions.</td>
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<td>4. <strong>Tell a facilitator if you need to leave early:</strong> If feeling distressed and want to leave, check in and debrief with a facilitator</td>
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<td>5. <strong>Don’t discuss past trauma, self-harm or suicide during the group:</strong> This can be triggering for other group members and is more appropriate for individual therapy.</td>
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<td>6. <strong>Listen to others:</strong> When other group members are sharing or talking, show respect and support them by actively listening to their experiences</td>
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<td>7. <strong>Avoid interrupting others:</strong> Have one person speak at a time and avoid having other conversations whilst group members are talking</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. <strong>Accept people as they are:</strong> Everyone has their own unique experiences and opinions. Try to accept all group members as they are and avoid making judgements.</td>
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<td>9. <strong>Use of language:</strong> Abusive or offensive language will not be tolerated</td>
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<td>10. <strong>Turn off mobile phones or switch to silent</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. <strong>Group members can offer support to other group members outside of the group:</strong> Mutual consent from both group members is required when group members want to support each other outside the group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. <strong>Advise facilitators of any intimate relationships you have with another group member:</strong> This includes siblings, family members, partners and friends.</td>
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</table>

Additional rules as agreed upon by the group:
Session Two: What is a Personality Disorder?

Personality disorders: Recognising and understanding behaviour

This session explores the diagnostic criteria for personality disorders and the key characteristics of borderline personality disorder (BPD) - one of the most common disorders.

**Personality disorders** are defined in American Psychiatric Association (2013) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 5th Edition, (DSM-5) as:

1. An enduring pattern of inner experience and behaviour that deviates markedly from the individual’s culture. This pattern is manifested in two (or more) of the following areas:
   - Cognition (i.e. ways of perceiving and interpreting self, other people, and events)
   - Affectivity (i.e. the range, intensity, lability, and appropriateness of emotional response)
   - Interpersonal functioning
   - Impulse control
2. The enduring pattern is inflexible and pervasive across a broad range of personal and social situations
3. The enduring pattern leads to clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning
4. The pattern is stable and of long duration, and its onset can be traced back at least to adolescence or early adulthood
5. The enduring pattern is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance abuse or another medical condition
Borderline Personality Disorder

**Borderline personality disorder** is one of the most common personality disorders, and people with this disorder display many (but not necessarily all) of these features:

- Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment
- A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterised by alternating between extremes of idealisation and devaluation
- Identity disturbance: Markedly and persistently unstable self-image and sense of self
- Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g. spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating)
- Recurrent suicidal behaviour, gestures, threats, or self-mutilating behaviour
- Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood
- Chronic feelings of emptiness
- Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger
- Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms

At least five of the above criteria need to be present for a diagnosis to be made. The DSM-5 is used by clinicians to diagnose mental illnesses. It is important to highlight that the purpose of including this information is to assist understanding of the disorder and what makes these young people different from their peers. Diagnosis should only be made by a qualified health professional.

**Prevalence key points**

6.5% of the Australian population will experience this pattern of problems during their lifetime. The age of onset for personality disorders is typically late adolescence to early adulthood, although the development of traits can usually be traced back into childhood.
Development of Personality Disorder

The likelihood of a person experiencing personality disorder is dependent on a combination of risk and protective factors. Figure 1 summarises this in relation to the development of personality disorder.

![Biopsychosocial model of personality disorder development](image)

**Figure 1.** Risk and protective factors associated with personality disorder development

### Biopsychosocial model of personality disorder development

Many factors, such as biological, heritability and psychosocial experiences such as adverse childhood experiences (actual or perceived), temperament and fit may contribute to personality disorder development. Therefore, no one factor causes personality disorder. In some studies, the genetic component of borderline personality disorder has been estimated to be as strong as 40%.

### Course of personality disorder key points

Research studies that have examined people with BPD over time and before and after taking part in specific treatments have identified that remission (or no longer meeting diagnostic criteria) for BPD is possible. Therefore, there is much hope for recovery.
Treatment for Personality Disorder

Psychological treatments for personality disorders are effective and often include group and individual therapy. Early intervention is often the most effective.

Medication is sometimes used to treat co-occurring disorders (such as depression) however there is no medication that specifically treats personality disorder.

Inpatient (or hospitalisation) treatment is not recommended for people with personality disorders unless this is for short-term crisis management.

Seeking Treatment for Borderline Personality Disorder

The Australian mental health system is complex and often difficult to navigate. The Project Air Strategy website has a services directory which may be a starting point to help you access treatment and assistance.

See www.projectairstrategy.org
Session Three: Understanding Triggers and Planning for Wellness

What is a Trigger?

Triggers are events that happen in the world around us that make us feel distressed. For example, it could be hearing someone talk about a particular topic, watching something in a movie, or being alone when we feel upset. Everyone has a different set of triggers, depending on our past life experiences. People who have experienced distressing or traumatic events in the past may be particularly sensitive to feeling triggered. The good news is that as you begin to learn more about your personal triggers, it becomes easier to understand why you might have reacted in a certain way when you’re triggered by something. Although it’s not always possible to avoid triggers, this means that we can have a better plan of what to do to best help ourselves if we are triggered.

What is a Warning Sign?

A warning sign is a little bit different to a trigger. Triggers tend to be things that happen outside of us, while warning signs tend to be linked to our personality and unique characteristics. This means that just like triggers, everyone has a different set of warning signs. For example, some people might notice that if their sleep is affected (sleeping much more or much less), it could be a sign that they may be becoming unwell. Others might find that they aren’t eating enough (or eating too much). Some people might notice that they become easily frustrated, and quick to get into arguments with people. The important thing to remember is that everyone has different warning signs and learning what our own signs are can really help us make sure we keep doing the things we need to so that we can stay well.

What might some of my warning signs be?

Remember: Warning signs are things that we notice within ourselves. Things that happen in our environment are triggers
We can plan for wellness.

What this means is that we need to think about the kinds of things that are good for us and make us feel a sense of wellbeing. Again, just like triggers and warning signs, everyone will have their own “tools” to keep themselves well. Looking after our health often goes a long way in making us feel better. These are things like making sure we get enough sleep, eating well, and doing some light exercise. Other things that help increase our wellbeing could be doing a favourite activity, like going for a walk in nature or listening to music. Or perhaps phoning a good friend. These are only a few possibilities. Think about the things you’ve done in the past that have really helped you when you’re in a time of distress.

Write down some tools that can help when you feel distressed or triggered:
Wellness Plan

Developing a wellness plan when you feel well can also help when you feel triggered. Work with your individual clinician and other supports to develop this plan. The wellness plan should be individually tailored to your needs, therefore if there are other factors which contribute to your wellbeing, please add them in.

Wellness Plan

Name:

What would I like to improve in my life?
(1) In the short term

(2) In the long term

Planning for wellness
What are my main triggers and warning signs?

What can I do to look after my physical health?

What are the “tools” I can use to increase my sense of wellbeing? (e.g., enjoyable activities, behaviours, attitudes)

Places and people I can contact in a crisis:

Lifeline 13 11 14 Emergency 000 NSW Mental Health Line 1800 011 511 Kids Helpline 1800 551 800

My support people (e.g. partner, family members, friends, psychologist, psychiatrist, teacher, school counsellor, social worker, case worker, GP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Contact Details</th>
<th>Role In My Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Signatures:

Date:
Homework Exercise

Take some time to develop your own sensory box. Try to include items in your box that are self-soothing.

Self Help

Making and Using a Sensory Box

Our five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch) play a major role in helping us understand, communicate and react to our environment. When experiencing strong emotions or during times of crisis, we may become overwhelmed. Stimulating our five senses can help us to soothe ourselves and may help us stay present in the moment.

Sensory boxes are designed to be available when you experience heightened emotions or difficult thoughts, so preparing a box in advance may be helpful. Examples of items you may wish to place in the sensory box include:

- **Sight:** Photos of friends, family or pets, pictures of places you have visited or would like to visit, affirmation cards, crystals or rocks with interesting colours, coloured papers and pens, paints with water
- **Sound:** Music player and headphones, flute, a bell, ukulele, rattle or drum
- **Smell:** Perfume, essential oils, candles; herbs such as lavender or rosemary; popping corn
- **Taste:** Herbal teas, favourite sweets or snacks, peppermints, lozenges, citrus, jellies or licorice
- **Touch:** Soft toys, scarf, stress ball, slime, bubble wrap, kinetic sand, playdough, driftwood, shells or stones from a beach or creek

When engaging with the sensory box, enjoy the experience and become absorbed in doing something you enjoy. Mindfully engage with each of the items in your sensory box, and describe internally what you see, hear, smell, taste or feel. Some people find self-soothing hard and may avoid being nice to themselves. If you engage in self-soothing and notice harsh, judgmental thoughts or difficult emotions arise, gently acknowledge them, and then return to trying to stay mindfully connected to the experience of being immersed in the box and the activities that appeal to you. Remember that it is normal for your attention to wander, and when you notice this happening gently turn your attention back to what you are doing.
Everyone experiences emotion. The experience of emotions can be reflective of our reactions to the thoughts and behaviours that we or others have. Emotions can be hard to manage, but they play a vital role in life and have functional purposes.

Emotions:
- Can help us understand a situation
- Act as a communication tool
- Can motivate us to take action on a subject which is important to us
- Act as an alert system

Emotions can be thought of by using an analogy of waves, such that emotions can come and go. Yet the intensity and duration in which emotion is experienced for can differ between people. Compared to the general population, people with BPD can experience emotions which are more intense and for a longer duration. That is why people with BPD can feel emotions more deeply and take longer to return to their normal resting state. This could be associated with a person’s developmental history, where:

- Some people are born more emotionally sensitive (genetic vulnerability)
- Environmental stressors can affect a person’s experience of emotions (environmental contributions)
Our emotions are linked to our thoughts and behaviours, therefore when we act on our emotions and thoughts, it can influence our behaviour and impact others. Depending on the situation, this can mean that emotions can sometimes get in the way of living a personally meaningful life.

Reflection Questions

Have there been times when you acted on your emotions recently? Was it helpful?
Do you ever just want to not experience emotions? What would life be like?
How are Emotions and the BPD Diagnostic Criteria Linked?

Although emotion dysregulation is a core component of the diagnostic criteria for BPD, the emotional experience differs between person to person. That means that everyone feels and expresses emotions differently.

Key diagnostic criteria associated with emotion dysregulation in BPD include:

- Criteria 6: Affective instability due to marked reactivity of mood
- Criteria 7: Chronic feelings of emptiness
- Criteria 8: Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger

These may lead to behaviours such as those identified in:

- Criteria 1: Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment
- Criteria 4: Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating)
- Criteria 5: Recurrent suicidal behaviour, gestures or threats or self-mutilating behaviour
- Criteria 9: Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms

Experiencing intense fluctuating emotions, emptiness and intense anger can be painful and uncomfortable, particularly if these emotions remain intense for an extended period of time. In an attempt to reduce the intensity of these feelings, some people engage in impulsive behaviours or may experience suicidal thoughts. Learning to manage these emotions may help you tolerate the intensity and duration of these emotions, and reduce their impact on your behaviour.

Managing Emotions

Managing emotions can be a difficult and complex process, however learning to effectively manage emotions can have positive benefits for our wellbeing, relationships and life in general. We can break down the process of managing emotions into three different components:

- 1. Identifying and naming emotions
- 2. Interpretation of the emotional experience
- 3. How do we express emotions

These three components do not happen in isolation, rather they are interconnected.
1. Identifying and Naming Emotions

Identifying and naming specific emotions is one of the first steps in learning to manage emotions more effectively. This can help you to understand what you are feeling and differentiate between emotional states. Some people with lived experience of BPD may find this process difficult, as they may not have a clear sense of the subtle differences between emotions. For example, a person with BPD may be able to identify that they are feeling angry however may not realise that the feeling of anger may exist on a continuum which can differ in intensity.

**Group Activity:** Identifying emotions and their intensity

| 😊 | 😞 | 😜 |
| 😊 | 😢 | 😔 |
| 😊 | 😊 | 😐 |
| 😞 | 😭 | 😞 |
| 😞 | 😥 | 😞 |
| 😞 | 😨 | 😞 |

Emoji created by Ibrandify – Freepik.com
Place the identified emotions from the emoji faces on the continuum based on the intensity of the emotion.
2. Interpretations of the Emotional Experience

Interpretations of emotions refer to the thoughts, beliefs, judgements and meaning that we place on a specific situation or emotion. These in turn have the ability to influence how we feel and think about a situation.

Our interpretations may be influenced by:

- **Thoughts:** The thoughts we have may be linked to our triggers and warning signs (discussed in the previous session), because we hold pre-existing interpretations to situations that occur externally or internally. The manner in which we view an external or internal situation can lead us to make interpretations about the present situation. However, our interpretations about what is going on does not always match with reality.
  - For example: Seeing someone laughing whilst looking at you and thinking that they are laughing at you. An alternative interpretation may be that the person who is laughing at something someone else said and they so happened to be looking in your direction.
  - Our thoughts and interpretations have the ability to shape our behaviours and experience of the world. Therefore, the choices that we make might not match

- **Other people around us:** How another person responds or reacts to a situation can influence our interpretations.

  For example; *Rennie and his friends Jerry and Bob are about to head off on a road trip down the coast for the weekend. Bob, whose car you will be travelling in, suddenly informs Rennie and Jerry that he will be unable to attend because he needs to meet a major deadline for work.*

  You are unsure as to how you feel about this situation, as on one hand you understand the demands of Bob’s work, yet you were looking forward to going away. Jerry reacts negatively to the situation by calling Bob ‘irresponsible and inconsiderate’. After this conversation with Jerry, you start to feel upset and angry about missing the road trip and put all the blame on Bob.

- **Vulnerabilities:** Refers to aspects which may increase our sensitivity to intense emotions (e.g. not taking care of ourselves, not sleeping, forgetting to eat, being stressed)

- **Other:** What other factors could influence our interpretations?
Reflection Activity: What was Influencing My Emotions?

Think back to a recent situation that left you feeling upset or placed you in an intense emotional state.
Give a brief description of what happened and what you thought about the situation.

How did this make you feel?
Reflecting on the situation are some of the contributing factors which influenced your interpretations.
3. Emotion Expression

Emotion expression refers to the behavioural component of managing emotions. The situation or context in which a person is in can determine whether the expression of specific emotion may be appropriate.

For example, it may be less helpful to have an argument over the phone with your flatmate about unpaid bills at work, compared to when you are at home.

Emotion expression and emotion regulation come hand in hand – particularly when emotions are strong and intense. However, learning to regulate strong and intense emotions can be difficult.

Activity

What strategies do you currently use to manage your emotions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy – e.g. Listen to music or go for a walk</th>
<th>Is this strategy helpful (✔ or ✘)</th>
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Remember the tool box from session 3? Put the strategies, which you consider helpful there!

It is important to remember that being able to regulate emotions doesn’t mean that emotions go away or are less intense. Regulating our emotions assist us to be able to cope and manage the emotions that come up. Even after expressing emotion, there may be resulting emotions surrounding this. These can linger and contribute to a slower return to your resting baseline.
4. Bringing it All Together

Consider the facts of this scenario:

'Max has waited for an hour for his girlfriend to pick him up after his football training session. Max does not have his phone and all his training mates have left. He is alone at the football field and the sun is starting to set. The longer Max waited for his girlfriend the more agitated and angry he felt towards his girlfriend. He believed that because his girlfriend was late, it meant that she did not care about him and no longer wanted to be in a relationship with him. Max also thought about the times that he picked her up on time and the errands that he did for her. When his girlfriend arrived to pick him up, Max was angry that she had forgotten him and decided to ignore her until she apologised and reconfirmed her commitment to the relationship. Max’s girlfriend explained that there was an accident on the road which contributed to major traffic delays and resulted in her being 1.5 hours late.'

What emotions do you think Max was feeling whilst waiting for his girlfriend?

What are some possible reasons as to why Max was feeling this way whilst waiting for his girlfriend?

What emotions do you think Max felt when his girlfriend explained what happened?
What are some possible reasons as to why Max was feeling this way after his girlfriend explained what happened?
Session Five: Relationships

Making and Maintaining Relationships

Relationships when experiencing BPD can be challenging. The difficulties associated with developing and maintaining relationships can be attributed to the interpersonal nature of personality disorders. Interpersonal difficulties are a core feature of BPD and this is reflected in the diagnostic criteria which can be identified in:

- **Criteria 1**: Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment
- **Criteria 2**: A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterised by alternating between extremes of idealisation and devaluation

For example:

*Mary and Stephanie are best friends who recently graduated from high school. Stephanie has decided to go to university, whilst Mary has decided to enter the workforce. Mary is concerned about their friendship as she believes that Stephanie will not have as much time for her. Stephanie ensures Mary that their friendship will remain unchanged.*

*As the university semester progresses, Stephanie makes a large group of friends, who she often makes plans with. Mary frequently contacts Stephanie asking whether she would like to go out for coffee, however Stephanie often declines the offer as she is busy with her new network of friends. As the year progresses, Mary becomes resentful and begins to blame Stephanie for her social isolation and intense emotional experiences.*

Some people with BPD may find relationships difficult to navigate and choose instead to not engage in relationships at all.
**Group discussion:** What are the benefits and challenges associated with not being involved in any relationships?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges Associated with Making and Maintaining Relationships

1. Maintaining Boundaries

In relationships, boundaries refer to the limits that we place on other people in regards to what they are allowed to say or do towards us. These boundaries differ depending on the type of relationship at question.

For example; a therapist may set boundaries on when their clients can contact them, whilst they may not have the same boundaries for members of their family.

Having boundaries can assist to nurture healthy relationships where both parties are treated fairly. Not setting appropriate boundaries may leave a person feeling:

- Exhausted
- Feeling manipulated, frustrated or angry
- Doing more than what you would like to do
- Lack of respect for oneself and others
- Resentment towards oneself and others
- May increase the risk of emotional volatility

Some people find setting boundaries difficult and this may be associated with:

- Not being taught how to set boundaries
- Experience of abusive relationships where boundaries were unclear

However, it is important to note that not everyone will respect your boundaries. People may try to push or test your boundaries. Our emotions are a good indicator of whether our boundaries have been violated. Feelings could potentially include; discomfort, anger, frustration, shame or disgust.
Group activity: Similarities and Differences in Relationships

Based on the scenario below, what boundaries would be appropriate to have?

**Scenario:**

As part of Gemma’s safety plan, she agreed with her therapist that she would call someone when she felt unsafe. Gemma has been feeling down and anxious for the past few days and wants to talk to someone about what is going on. She considers who to call in her wider support network – friends, work colleagues, and therapist.

What boundaries would be important to consider?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Work Colleagues</th>
<th>Therapist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Balancing Your Needs with the Needs of Others

What does it mean to “find the right balance” in a relationship? We talk about balance because relationships are all about two people coming together to connect, share their experiences, and/or work towards a shared goal. There are many different types of relationships so this might look different depending on what kind of relationship we’re talking about (e.g., long-term partner vs. a colleague at work).

What all relationships have in common is that there needs to be a healthy and appropriate balance between what each person gives to the relationship. It can be helpful to think about this in terms of what you need from the relationship vs. what the other person needs. In some cases, we can find ourselves in relationships where we are giving a lot more to the other person than they’re giving to us. Or we can find ourselves in relationships where the other person is giving a lot but we may not be willing to do the same.

Conflict and problems in relationships may often be related to these things. When the balance is off we may need to learn how to identify this and restore it.
3. Communication Style

Communication is the key to satisfying relationships. It helps each person feel valued, and that their needs are being heard and responded to. However there are multiple ways of communicating what you need and what you are feeling to another person. The style in which you communicate can impact upon the manner in which another person responds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Styles</th>
<th>Passive</th>
<th>Assertive</th>
<th>Aggressive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>General</strong></td>
<td>Compliant, submissive, talks little, vague non-committal communication, puts self down, praises others</td>
<td>Actions and expressions fit with words spoken, firm but polite and clear messages, respectful of self and others</td>
<td>Sarcastic, harsh, always right, superior, know it all, interrupts, talks over others, critical, put-downs, patronising, disrespectful of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;I don't mind...that's fine...yes alright&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;That's a good idea, and how about if we did this too...&quot; or &quot;I can see that, but I'd really like...&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;This is what we're doing, if you don't like it, tough&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beliefs</strong></td>
<td>You're okay, I'm not</td>
<td>I'm okay, you're okay</td>
<td>I'm okay, you're not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Has no opinion other than that the other person/s are always more important, so it doesn't matter what they think anyway</td>
<td>Believes or acts as if all the individuals involved are equal, each deserving of respect, and no more entitled than the other to have things done their way</td>
<td>Believe they are entitled to have things done their way, the way they want it to be done, because they are right, and others (and their needs) are less important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eyes</strong></td>
<td>Avoids eye contact, looks down, teary, pleading</td>
<td>Warm, welcoming, friendly, comfortable eye contact</td>
<td>Narrow, emotion-less, staring, expressionless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posture</strong></td>
<td>Makes body smaller – stooped, leaning, hunched shoulders</td>
<td>Relaxed, open, welcoming</td>
<td>Makes body bigger – upright, head high, shoulders out, hands on hips, feet apart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hands</strong></td>
<td>Together, fidgety, clammy</td>
<td>Open, friendly and appropriate gestures</td>
<td>Pointing fingers, making fists, clenched, hands on hips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consequences</strong></td>
<td>Give in to others, don't get what we want or need, self-critical thoughts, miserable</td>
<td>Good relationships with others, happy with outcome and to compromise</td>
<td>Make enemies, upset others and self, feel angry and resentful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

www.getselfhelp.co.uk/communication.htm  © Carol Uryan 2000, permission to use for therapy purposes
Effective Communication

There are a number of steps to effective communication. It can be helpful to break these down into simple questions to ask ourselves when we are trying to communicate in relationships:

- How do I feel?
- What am I aiming to achieve in this situation?
- What is important to me in the long-term for this relationship?
- How can I understand the other person's behaviours in this situation?
- How do I communicate what I need to say in a way that helps me to meet my needs but also protects the relationship?

This may sound like a lot to keep in mind but thinking about questions such as these can help us to make sure that we look after our relationships and have our needs met.

Activity: Effective Communication

Think about a current or past relationship that was important in your life. Try to recall a time during this relationship when it was important for you to clearly communicate something to the other person (perhaps you wanted to ask them for something that you needed or they did something that upset you and you wanted to express this). Use the following template as a guide to help you think through the situation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did I feel in this situation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What were my thoughts and feelings?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| What did I want to achieve? |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What were my long-term hopes for this relationship?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How did they relate to the current situation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What were some of the ways that I could understand the other person’s actions or perspective?

How could I have most effectively communicated what I needed to say without doing any harm to the relationship?

What is a Healthy Relationship?

Healthy relationships are what we strive towards.

Characteristics of a healthy relationship:

- Mutual trust and acceptance of each other
- Consideration and balancing of each other’s needs
- Open, effective and assertive communication
- Have clear and explicit boundaries but also allows for flexibility
- Personal identity
- Quality time together
- Ability to provide and receive feedback from each other
- Ability to identify each other’s points of view
- Balance between having own time/space and being together
- Having responsibility over own thoughts, behaviours and emotions, rather than blaming the other person
- Physical safety

Are there other characteristics that you consider as part of a healthy relationship?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Notes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Session Six: Identity, Beliefs and Values

What do we mean by ‘identity’?

When we talk about “identity”, we are talking about who you are as a person – the things that make you unique. Everyone has an identity that is shaped by our experiences in life, for example;

- Our family background,
- Culture,
- Friends,
- Media

As we grow and develop, our identities generally become stronger and a lot of people have a secure sense of who they are and the kind of life they want to live. Unfortunately this is not the case for everyone. Some people may struggle with knowing who they are and how to make choices that help them live the kind of life that’s important to them.

People who have a diagnosis of BPD may find that they are unsure about who they really are. This might cause painful feelings as they try to make sense of this and think about ways that they’ve acted in the past that might seem confusing or in conflict with what they want in life.

How do our beliefs about ourselves and the world influence our identity?

Over the course of our lives, we develop certain beliefs about ourselves and the world around us. It is these core beliefs that shape our identity. We may be conscious of some of these beliefs but a lot of the time they have been learnt from a young age and we may not even be aware of them until we start questioning and reflecting on our lives. Our beliefs guide our actions and choices in life. This is why it’s so important to reflect on what our beliefs are. This helps us to feel more secure in our identity and make choices that are in line with who we want to be.
What are values and why might they be important?

Values are similar to beliefs but also a little different. Our beliefs are learned assumptions that we hold to be true. They are what we personally believe about ourselves and life. Values, on the other hand, are ideas we hold about what we consider to be meaningful and important in life. Values are like lighthouses that guide us towards particular actions and goals that are in line with what we want out of life. Everyone has a different set of values in life. Perhaps this is something that you’ve thought about before and you already have an idea about what some of your most important values are. It’s also very common for people to find it hard to know what their values are. Giving some thought to our values can be very helpful in reflecting on our core beliefs about ourselves and the world. It can also help with planning goals that enable us to live a satisfying and meaningful life, and strengthening our sense of identity so we can live according to who we really want to be.

Identity and the BPD Diagnostic Criteria:

People with personality disorders may struggle with their sense of self and may have difficulties knowing who they are and what they want out of life. Some people might feel empty inside and others might strongly rely on other people to make them feel like they’re worth something as a person. Some people may be very rigid in the way they interact with the world, becoming overly focused on work, rules, and doing things perfectly. These difficulties may make it harder to set and follow long-term goals and have a meaningful sense of direction in life.

Difficulties with identity and sense of self can be identified in:
- **Criteria 3: Identity disturbance:** Markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self
- **Criteria 7: Chronic feelings of emptiness**
Discussion: What influences a person's identity, beliefs and values?

Identity, beliefs and values may be influenced by:
How do Values Influence Behaviour?

Values Vignettes

Sally (age 32) is a vegetarian and has a deep concern for environmental and animal rights issues. Sally purchases organic food whenever she can, however sometimes she cannot afford to do so. She also loves gardening, but over the last few weeks her schedule has been very busy which has prevented her from doing this activity.

Sally has very strong opinions and she always tries to be open about her beliefs when talking to others. She often describes herself as ‘authentic’ and is not afraid of conflict. However, due to this she sometimes finds herself in arguments with others who hold different beliefs than she does – for example her cousin, Dave, who works as a butcher. Sally has mixed feelings as she cares a lot about her family and recognises that this is his only source of income, however she still feels obligated to express her animal rights concerns.

Sally enjoys hiking and feels most happy when she is in nature, going on adventures. If she has the money, she loves to travel overseas when possible. However, she also often feels guilty about the environmental impact of her travel. Recently, Sally has not gone travelling for a while due to her commitment to a new relationship with Alex, her partner, to whom she is starting to develop very strong feelings. While the relationship is going well and she enjoys it a lot, she is slightly concerned about how this developing relationship will impact on her lifestyle and independence.

Question: What are some of the values that you can identify for Sally based on this vignette?
Barriers to Living a Values Based Life

In order to be able to live a satisfying and meaningful life based on our values, it's important to consider what could get in the way of living life according to our values. This will look different for each individual, based on the unique challenges that may be present in your lives. There are, however, some common challenges to living in line with values:

- Not having a clear idea of who you are as a person
- Not spending enough time thinking about your values
- Being very busy with the tasks and routines of daily life and finding it hard to schedule tasks and goals that will help you live according to your values.
- Finding that some of your values are in conflict with each other or that other people do not agree with your beliefs or values. This may lead to feelings that it is difficult to choose the best course of action in a particular situation.
- Feeling guilt, shame, or regret about the times in your life when you didn’t live according to your values. Finding that these feelings make it hard to focus on making positive changes.
- Changing your belief system for others

Question:

Think back to the vignette about Sally on the previous page and brainstorm some of the potential barriers to the characters living according to their values. Jot down your responses in the box below.
What are my Values?

Take a moment to think about some of the values that you may have for your life. We will be engaging in a group activity to explore this future.

Write down the values you consider important in the box below
What is Self-Compassion?

One of the leading researchers on self-compassion describes it like this:

“...being touched by and open to one’s own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one’s suffering and to heal oneself with kindness. Self-compassion involves offering nonjudgmental understanding to one’s pain, inadequacies and failures, so that one’s experience is seen as part of the larger human experience” (Neff, 2003, p. 87)

So this means that self-compassion is about seeing that everyone goes through pain and suffering, including ourselves. To have an attitude of self-compassion means being kind to ourselves. When we’re going through a difficult time, we allow ourselves to experience the painful feelings without judging ourselves – which is so easy to do and often makes us feel even worse! Instead, we try and stay open to the painful feelings and do our best to comfort and look after ourselves.

One of the reasons self-compassion is so important is because research has found that people with higher levels of self-compassion have greater levels of well-being and resilience, and show less symptoms of depression and anxiety.
What is Self-Care?

Self-care simply means what we can do to help us show more compassion to ourselves.

For a moment, think back to what we learnt about distress tolerance... When we use distress tolerance skills, these are often things that help us to distract or distance ourselves from difficult situations. Self-care is a little different. When we practice self-care we focus on doing things to look after ourselves – things that soothe us and make us feel better.

Be kind to yourself in moments of distress. There is a lot of research showing the benefits of engaging your ‘5 senses’. Some examples of how you can practice self-care include:

1. **What you see**
   - Focus your vision on something you find soothing, for example, the flame of a candle, a flower, the waves in the ocean, or look at the stars.

2. **What you hear**
   - Listen to sounds that you find soothing, for example, beautiful music, running water, sounds of nature (including birds, waves, rainfall), or sing a favourite tune.

3. **What you smell**
   - Try using your favourite smells to soothe yourself, for example, light a scented candle, bake biscuits or smell the ocean breeze.

4. **What you taste**
   - Chew or eat something that you love. Take a moment to really taste what you have chosen to eat or drink. Notice what it feels like to enjoy eating something.

5. **What you touch**
   - Take a bubble bath, put on a textured blouse, brush your hair or stroke a pet.

Best of all, engage in an activity that uses all or most of your senses at once, for example, sit on the beach while watching, listening to, and smelling the ocean and feel the sand between your toes. Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or visualise a relaxing scene. Imagine your feelings or emotions as a wave that comes and goes and changes in intensity over time. These activities may help you feel more alive and provide relief from your distress.
Activity: Self-Compassion to Me

Draw or make a collage about what self-compassion means to you. *(This can be done here or on a separate piece of paper).*

Take Home Summary Activity

Pick one self-care activity that is meaningful to you and you are willing to take part in over the next week.

*If you are comfortable, share how you went next week with the group. You can choose how you would like to express the experience (e.g. through words, a drawing, pictures, objects or create a sensory box!)*
Session Eight: Wellness and Recovery

What is Wellness and Recovery in BPD?

Wellness and recovery in BPD is an individualised process which means different things to different people, as such there is not one way to recovery in BPD. For some people, recovery might be associated with having better control over symptoms or being able to go to work. Whilst for others, it might be associated with having more time with their children or being able to go out when it suits them.

Research examining the lived experiences of people with personality disorder have suggested that recovery may be a journey of ‘self-discovery’, where through engaging in relationships and society you learn more about yourself. However, there are many ways of doing this.

It is important to know that wellness and recovery in BPD is possible; however it may require a lot of effort and commitment. Additionally, recovery is an extended journey that may involve learning about yourself, how to self-manage the symptoms of BPD, and developing new skills and insights. Many people talk about recovery as being ‘fluctuating’ that is, you may experience ‘two steps forward and one step back’ - This is normal. Recovery is not about changing your personality.

Understanding what wellness and recovery means to you and what you want for wellness and recovery is an important part of the process.
Self-Reflection: What wellness and recovery means to you?
Goals that are SMART

The personal meaning placed on wellness and recovery can also act as a goal to work towards. Sometimes, however, our goals can be daunting as you may not be able to see how to achieve them or you may not feel in the right place to start working on these specific goals. But all goals can be broken down into smaller ones. We can do small things to help us gain a sense of wellness.

Setting goals that are SMART can help us start this process. These can be used for long term and short term goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What does it stand for?</th>
<th>Questions to ask yourself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>- What do I want to achieve?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Why do I want to achieve this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What do I need in order to achieve this goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>- How will I know if I am progressing with this goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- How will I know when I have achieved this goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>- What steps will I need to take in order to achieve this goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>- Are the goals that I want to achieve important to my life right now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- At this point in my life, is it the right time to be working on these goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Does this goal align with my long term plans?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Does this goal align with my values?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>- How long will it realistically take to achieve this goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What date will I give myself until to achieve this goal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What times during the week will I allocate myself to solely work on this goal?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to remember that working with others to achieve goals is easier than trying to achieve goals on your own. Think about the type of support that you need or the people that you need to help you achieve your specific goal.

You can come back to this goal setting exercise, when you have goals you want to work on.
### SMART Goals Worksheet - Example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions to ask yourself</th>
<th>Example of SMART goal</th>
<th>Who can help me accomplish this goal?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **S** Specific | - What do I want to achieve?  
- Why do I want to achieve this?  
- What do I need in order to achieve this goal? | I want to work on developing skills to help me reduce my anxiety when I am out in public. This will help me to be more relaxed and be better able to hang out with my friends more often. I will need to develop some skills and opportunities to hang out with friends. | My health professional to help me develop skills that I can use when I feel anxious in public. I will need to ask my friends to hang out with me. |
| **M** Measurable | - How will I know if I am progressing with this goal?  
- How will I know when I have achieved this goal? | I will keep track of my anxiety levels when in public, by journaling about how I felt and rate my level of anxiety out of 10 after each time I meet with my friends. I will know that I am progressing with this goal by counting how many times I hang out with my friends and by my level of anxiety. | |
| **A** Achievable | - What steps will I need to take in order to achieve this goal? | In order to achieve this goal, I need to:  
1. Talk to my health professional about my anxiety in social settings  
2. Work with my health professional to develop skills to reduce my anxiety  
3. Contact my friends and ask them hang out  
4. Actually go and hang out with my friends in public | Health professional  
Friends |
| **R** Relevant | - Are the goals that I want to achieve important to my life?  
- At this point in my life, is it the right time to be working on these goals?  
- Does this goal align with my long term plans?  
- Does this goal align with my values? | This goal will be worthwhile because I will feel less socially isolated and I will be more confident within social settings. | Health professional  
Friends |
| **T** Timely | - How long will it realistically take to achieve this goal?  
- What date will I give myself until to achieve this goal?  
- What times during the week will I allocate myself to work on this goal? | I will talk to my health professional next time I see them to discuss learning some skills. | Health professional |
## SMART Goal Worksheet – Participant

What goal am I currently working on?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My SMART goal</th>
<th>Who can help me accomplish this goal?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S Specific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Measurable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Achievable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Relevant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T Timely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Session Nine: Special Topics

This session is focused on reviewing topics that the group has specifically requested. There is room below for you to take notes:
Session Ten: Review of Program Sessions

This session is focused on reviewing topics that the group has specifically requested. There is room below for you to take notes: