

Mental Health Support Groups

What are Mental Health (MH) Support Groups?

MH Support Groups were founded by Vivian Cheng and Brian Henderson in 2020. As survivors of mental ill-health, they both recognized that peer support plays a paramount role in social and emotional assistance. There is an acute need in Hong Kong for mental health support groups to supplement professional help.

Our aim is to create a trusting and psychologically safe environment for participants to support each other by sharing their stories, struggles and accomplishments, and listening to others as they share similar concerns.

We seek to provide authentic engagement for participants to gain informal education about mental health challenges, support of others who have 'been there', and a sense of belonging.

Sessions are peer-led and facilitated in groups by volunteers with lived experience of mental health concerns.

Please Note: These support groups are not intended to provide medical advice, counselling or therapy.

Our Mission

To provide an environment where people feel safe talking about their struggles with mental health.

Our Vision

A world where talking about mental health is normalized.

MH Support Groups Meeting Agreements

For the facilitator: *It is suggested that the bold typeface parts of the agreements be read every week with the entire agreements being read if there are new people. Distributing the agreements is also suggested.*

THIS IS A MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUP FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES OR WANT TO LEARN ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND WHO ARE SEEKING SUPPORT FROM OTHERS HAVING SIMILAR EXPERIENCES. WE DO NOT PROVIDE MEDICAL ADVICE, COUNSELLING OR THERAPY. THE FACILITATORS ARE NOT MEDICALLY QUALIFIED. WE CANNOT PROVIDE MEDICAL ADVICE OR DIAGNOSIS. IF YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE EXPERIENCING A MENTAL ILLNESS, WE STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP.

We all want these groups to be a safe place to share so we collectively agree to the following:

1 We agree to keep confidentiality. What is said here, stays here. If we feel it would be helpful to share something we heard in group, we do not use names or other identifying information outside the group.

Please note: *All facilitators and group members have a responsibility to disclose to appropriate authorities any concerns regarding possible imminent harm or abuse to self, family or others.*

2 We agree to be respectful of others. We agree that excessive swearing and discriminatory or stigmatizing remarks or jokes such as those based on race, origins, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, or mental or physical disability are not acceptable.

3 We agree to practice active listening with an open mind. We agree to share our concerns and give feedback in a non-judgmental way. In terms of time allocation in the discussions, the facilitators will prioritise those with the most urgent need for support meeting by meeting. But we will endeavour to ensure that, over a

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series of meetings, everyone has an opportunity to share and be supported. Participants are encouraged to share fully but as concisely as possible so as to allow time for others to share and receive support.

- 4 **We agree to speak from our own perspective using “I statements”.** For example: “When I felt that way... ”
We find sharing personal insight is usually more helpful than giving advice even when advice is requested.
- 5 **We agree to allow the person sharing to finish before checking if they would like feedback or asking questions.** Questions should be open (e.g. how? what? when? Please say more about ‘x’). Participants can respectfully decline to answer any question without giving a reason.
- 6 **We agree to refrain from making comments or having conversations with others in the group while someone is sharing.** We find this to be very distracting to the whole group and disrespectful to the person sharing.
- 7 **During group meetings, we agree to refrain from substance use, self-harm, or aggression towards other group members.**
- 8 **We agree not to engage in detailed talk about suicide methods or attempts, self-harm, or substance abuse.** This can be triggering for some people. However, it is acceptable to talk about one’s thoughts and feelings regarding these issues.
- 9 **When talking about mental health practitioners, treatments, or medications and their side effects, we agree to keep in mind that we are all unique and that these can affect each person differently.** We understand that this group cannot provide medical advice or diagnosis, only share their personal experiences.
- 10 **We agree to do our best to begin and end meetings on time.** If we know we are going to be late, we will do our best to let the facilitator know. If we arrive after a meeting has begun, we agree to join in quietly.
- 11 **We agree to silence or turn off our cell phones.** If we need to take an important call or leave the room for another reason, we try to wait until the person sharing has finished.
- 12 **If you are feeling suicidal or may harm yourself or someone else, please tell us. We agree to support you to get help.**

We require your name and email address or mobile phone number in order to contact you with information about meeting times and locations and to confirm attendance. We will share your contact details with group facilitators so they know who to expect in the group they are leading and they may try to contact you if you are late.

Some venue hosts may require us to provide a list of participant names in advance, but we will not disclose your email or phone number to any third party without your consent. For group emails, we will use the ‘bcc’ function or equivalent confidential method. You may choose to opt into a WhatsApp group in which case your phone number will be visible to other participants in the WhatsApp group. We will use electronic calendar invitations that may make your email address visible to other members of your group.

If you join a group that is dedicated to a specific mental illness, we will keep note of the fact that you opted to join that group and, therefore, it may be inferred that you have personal experience of that mental illness.

If you would like a copy of the information we hold about you, or would like to correct it, or have it deleted, please email info@wholebusinesswellness.com.

By attending one of our support group meetings, you acknowledge receipt of these rules and agree to abide by them.