



Twenty-Four Topics

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The Twenty-Four program topics are the core of Better Bloke peer support programme and are common to all three Better Blokes support services.

The Twenty-Four Topics are drawn from:

- the teachings of Mike Lew, a psychotherapist and group therapy leader in the Boston, MA. He is the Co-Director of The Next Step Counselling and Training Centre.
- the experience of the management of MSSAT Better Blokes.
- the twelve topics used in many peer support addiction recovery groups.

These Twenty-Four Topics have been refined over the last four years. They are now used as the subject of the weekly Peer Support Groups, the One to One support meetings, and the Better Blokes residential workshop.

Topic Number	Title	Description
1	Who am I	Background, introductions, getting started. Does it help to identify with other men with similar experiences? Are you strengthened when you realise you are not alone?
2	Family of origin	Where did it all start from? Childhood conditioning, emotional patterns, parents, caregiver's, teachers. What is your personal history, your pepeha? This might include your nationality, culture, spiritual systems, belief systems or lack of beliefs. What are your experiences from family: customs, habits and traditions?
3	Coping mechanisms	Triggers – do I have triggers and what events, words, emotions, situations trigger my reactions?

		<p>What are the underlying causes to my verbal and physical reactions?</p> <p>Have I used coping mechanisms to lessen emotional pain from past trauma e.g. alcohol, drugs, sex, overwork/training, gambling, obsessive thinking?</p> <p>Are coping mechanisms still necessary in my life?</p>
4	Secrecy, shame, guilt	<p>Do I have secrets?</p> <p>Do my secrets keep me sick e.g. do they appear as negative behaviours, some of which are subconscious?</p> <p>Do I feel guilt or shame?</p> <p>Shame belongs to the person who abused me as a child, how do I feel about that?</p> <p>What are my fears and hurts from past trauma: sexual, physical, verbal, emotional, witnessing violence done to others, childhood neglect?</p>
5	Tell your story	<p>You can share what you need to and choose to.</p> <p>If you choose you can speak your truth in a safe circle of men (hurts, fears, hopes & dreams) and experience myself as you are.</p> <p>You can get the validation you need to empower yourself. Then choose to make positive changes in your life.</p> <p>Speak about yourself; keep others safe by not criticising or putting down others.</p> <p>Open yourself to being affirmed with encouraging language if you choose.</p> <p>If you feel safe enough, ask for feedback to encourage positive changes in behaviour.</p>
6	Self esteem	<p>Do you feel a lack of self-esteem?</p> <p>How do you define self-esteem?</p> <p>Where does a lack of self-esteem come from?</p> <p>When you hurt others with anger you keep that anger inside yourself. When you show others acts of kindness you get to keep kindness too.</p>

7	Relationships and trust	<p>Do you feel trust/trusted in your relationships?</p> <p>How is trust destroyed in relationships?</p> <p>How can you build more trust in your relationships with others?</p> <p>How can you de-escalate conflict in communication with others?</p> <p>How can you let go of self-doubt?</p>
8	Boundaries	<p>Saying no is OK.</p> <p>You don't have to enable another person to hurt me with words or actions.</p> <p>You may ask someone not to verbally abuse you.</p> <p>You may remove yourself from a situation if you feel unsafe.</p> <p>Do you feel that you need to develop emotional boundaries?</p> <p>How do you do that?</p> <p>It is OK to deflect and reflect negativity.</p>
9	Anger	<p>What is anger for you?</p> <p>Anger is a feeling, violence is a behaviour (verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, and mental).</p> <p>How can you use the "energy" of anger creatively?</p> <p>How can you express anger safely?</p> <p>What lies beneath your feeling of anger?</p> <p>How do significant others express their anger around you?</p>
10	Masculinity and gender	<p>Myths about masculinity: "</p> <p>Big boys don't cry."</p> <p>"Harden up!"</p> <p>"You cry baby, I'll give you something to cry about."</p> <p>What experiences in childhood stopped you from expressing your feelings of anger, hurt, your tears, and fears?</p>

		<p>Men can be affectionate and soft as well as “warrior”.</p> <p>Feelings e.g. mad, sad, glad, hurt are neither masculine nor feminine.</p> <p>All feelings are experienced by men, women, boys and girls.</p>
11	Forgiving / letting go	<p>How do you let go of past hurts and manage present fears?</p> <p>What does “forgiveness” mean to you?</p> <p>Do you think it is OK to feel angry about abuse done to your body?</p> <p>How will you prepare yourself to confront and/or challenge the person who has hurt or abused you?</p>
12	Moving on	<p>What does moving on mean to you?</p> <p>Do you have a support network?</p> <p>How can you build a support network?</p> <p>What do you love doing and how can you do it more often?</p> <p>Where do you want to go (career, recreation, travel, education, relationships) and how will you get there?</p>
13	Surrender	<p>Honest admission of hurts and fears.</p> <p>Hopes & dreams (liberation from obsessive thinking).</p> <p>I choose to react or respond.</p> <p>Time out for safety.</p>
14	Hopes & goals	<p>Reflect on achievements.</p> <p>What can we choose to believe in?</p> <p>Importance of an open mind to future possibilities.</p> <p>Variety of ways to have faith in yourself.</p> <p>Taking new actions, overcome fear.</p>

15	Self-belief	<p>Acceptance of yourself is on the path to belief in yourself.</p> <p>What is your concept of inner wisdom?</p> <p>Interdependency = strength in connection with other people.</p>
16	Honesty & courage	<p>I take responsibility for myself, my words and actions.</p> <p>I avoid blaming others.</p> <p>How do I cause conflict with others? (My children, partner, family, friends)</p>
17	Integrity - Truthfulness &	<p>I admit my reactive behaviours where I have hurt other people.</p> <p>Stepping out of isolation and into self-awareness.</p> <p>Who can I trust with my vulnerability ?</p> <p>How have I been hurt ?</p>
18	Openness & acceptance	<p>I open my mind to possibilities of change – progress not perfection.</p> <p>Self-acceptance is key.</p> <p>I am willing to take new actions.</p>
19	Humility & vulnerability	<p>Opening myself to others – relationship & trust.</p> <p>Overcoming fears by sharing with others.</p> <p>Change in attitude to reach out to others.</p>
20	Restitution	<p>Openness to admit harming others.</p> <p>Showing kindness to others.</p> <p>Learning to live with others: live & let live.</p>
21	Compassion	<p>Awareness of judgements.</p> <p>Readiness to take consequences for past actions.</p> <p>Showing tolerance & love as a way of making amends.</p>

22	Perseverance & vigilance	<p>Emotional balance – honestly acknowledging my feelings in relationships with loved ones and key people.</p> <p>Settling with my past conflicts means more energy for present commitments.</p> <p>Restraint and self-discipline is helpful in relationship communication – building trust career and personal.</p>
23	Culture	<p>Awareness of cultural & spiritual origins.</p> <p>Mindfulness and meditation.</p> <p>Ask for connection with self / awareness of thoughts.</p> <p>Self-reflection / examination and meditation can lead to more options and positive life choices.</p>
24	Service	<p>Take new actions, change old attitudes.</p> <p>Clarity about expectations. Clear emotional boundaries with other people – say no to abuse in all forms.</p> <p>Becoming more conscious of my reactions and choosing to demonstrate acts of kindness.</p> <p>Ask what is your responsibility in this interaction?</p> <p>Choose to give more to people who show you acceptance and validation.</p>