



Facilitator
Peer Support Group
Manual

24 Topics

Foreword

Embodied in these 24 topics is a distillation of peer support work over the last 80 years both national and international.

Providing guidance and prompting for group process and individual transformation.

Dedicated to developing safe circles for men - people choosing to move closer to freedom from their shadows.

Founded on "power with" and "I am OK" principles – encouraging change from within.

Leading to less reactive behaviours, more peaceful, caring relationships with our children, partners, families, friends and colleagues.

Encouraged by the growth in awareness of all types of abuse to human beings.

Enabled by a groundswell of support for Better Blokes work in Northland and Auckland.

Designed to meet the demand for trained facilitators who can work with peer support groups in all communities.

This is a living document and will evolve. Topics will be added; online access will become available for our facilitators.

Better Blokes welcome you.....

Index

Peer Support System	1
Peer Support Group Meeting Plan	2
<u>TOPICS</u>	
1 . Who Am I Really?	3
2 . Family of Origin?	4
3 . Coping Mechanisms / Survival Strategies	5
4 . Secrecy, Shame, Guilt	6
5 . Tell Your Story	7
6 . Self Esteem	8
7 . Relationships and Trust	9
8 . Boundaries	10
9 . Anger	11
10 . Masculinity and Gender	12
11 . Forgiving / Letting Go	13
12 . Moving On	14
13 . Surrender	15
14 . Hopes and Goals	16
15 . Self Beliefs and Faith	17
16 . Honesty and Courage	18
17 . Integrity and Truthfulness	19
18 . Acceptance of Self and Others	20
19 . Humility and Vulnerability	21
20 . Restitution / Acknowledging Harmful Behaviours	22
21 . Compassion / Kindness to Others	23
22 . Perseverance and Vigilance	24
23 . Culture and Spirituality	25
24 . Service	26
Acknowledgments	27

Peer Support System

Why We Do This Work

Better Blokes offers peer support for men recovering from emotional, verbal, physical and sexual harm. All facilitators have travelled their own paths towards healing and are able and willing to support other men to become whole. It is the passion, commitment and strength of our facilitators that is the bedrock of the Better Blokes service.

Our facilitators understand the affects of harm, will have participated in peer support groups, completed inhouse training and have relevant qualifications or training in a related field such as teaching, social work, counselling and peer support.

The Values We Hold

As an organisation, Better Blokes is committed to creating safe spaces for men to grow and heal, without imposing any ideological framework. Better Blokes respects the diversity of different men's life experiences, beliefs, values, cultures, spiritual backgrounds and sexual orientations. We work with a strength-based philosophy, encouraging men to identify and value their wholeness, while taking responsibility for their emotions, words and behaviours, and the effects that those have on others in their lives.

Men who have been harmed have had their boundaries violated, been deprived of their mana and had their voices silenced. Better Blokes believes that these must be allowed to grow back by treating men with respect, listening to their stories with compassion, and demonstrating a model of power with, rather than power over.

How

To create safe spaces for men to grow we must rebuild the boundaries that were violated when they were abused as children. Guidelines let all men know where the boundaries are and what shared behaviour is needed to create safety. This transparency erases the toxic secrecy that poisoned the lives of men and damaged their psyches.

To help men find their voices we have 24 topics that are the basis for weekly discussion at peer support groups and individual meetings. These topics come from Better Blokes experience and the experience both nationally and internationally of professionals and organisations working to heal the pain of trauma.

Credibility

Better Blokes has been supporting men for ten years. Building upon the work of twenty years of male support services in New Zealand and the work of specialist professionals internationally. It has MSD Level approval.

Better Blokes is an incorporated society and registered charity with current registration and approved annual return. Annual accounts are prepared by chartered accountants and audited to Not for Profit XRB standards.

Better Blokes has a sound history of ongoing support from charitable foundations with a steadily increasing income stream to match expansion of service provision.

Peer Support Group Meeting Plan

- 1) Ask one of the men to open with a karakia, a poem, a quote, reflection or prayer. If no response then facilitator to open as above.
- 2) Read group guidelines and ask “are there any comments to guidelines?”
- 3) If there is a new member joining the group for the first time, start with a brief five minute introductory round. This should focus on how and why current members began attending the peer support group. Otherwise go straight to Step (4).
- 4) Introduction to the night’s topic and present the reading and topic questions.
- 5) First sharing round, and decide on sharing time (time keeper?).
- 6) Tea and coffee break (optional - check with the men).
- 7) Second sharing round, and decide on sharing time (time keeper?). (Ask for feedback if you want - or if agreed to - open discussion)
- 8) Next week’s meeting venue and any reminders of upcoming events, e.g. new members joining.
- 9) Closing words - karakia, poem, quote, reflection or prayer - as with the opening.
- 10) Tidy up and set alarm if necessary.

Topic 1

WHO AM I REALLY?

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

Background/Please share anything you want about your life:

What about your family? Culture?

What you're passionate about?

Your hurts, fears? Your hopes and dreams?

Even as a child, I had grown-up responsibilities, so it is no wonder that I grew up to be a caretaker. It seemed so comfortable, so automatic to think of others first and to give myself completely to whatever crisis was at hand without a thought for myself. When I became aware that this was not one of my most admirable traits but was instead a form of self-destructiveness, I was horrified. I set out to wipe out all such behaviour and attitudes. I was determined to become self-involved and uncaring as possible.

Fortunately, I failed to make such a radical change. Today, years later, I am still a caretaker, and I probably always will be. But now I consider it a valued characteristic, a gift of my upbringing that can greatly enhance my life ***if I don't carry it to the extreme.*** Although I no longer do things for others that they could do for themselves, I still try to be nurturing to them as well as myself.

Today's Reminder:

Today I will try not to condemn parts of myself while accepting other parts. I am a composite, and I love myself best when I embrace all that I am.

“My imperfections and failures are as much a blessing from God as my successes and my talents, and I lay them both at His feet.”

- Mahatma Gandhi

Topic 2

FAMILY OF ORIGIN?

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What was your experience as a child growing up in your family of origin?

Your hurts and fears?

Strengths, Talents, Gifts?

Sexual attack by a stranger therefore carries different weight than attack by someone known to the child. We are somewhat more prepared for external dangers. Except in a very general way, the child victim never trusted the stranger in the first place. It is logical for a child who has been attacked by a stranger to turn to family for support, understanding, and nurturing—to begin healing in safety. If it is necessary to retreat from the world into the protection of loved ones, he can do so. The family comforts, encourages, protects, and eventually guides the child back to the larger world. It teaches him to better protect himself and determine a reasonable level of trust.

But what if Mummy or Daddy (or Uncle Henry or Auntie Em) is the attacker? Who does the child trust? Where does he turn for understanding and protection? The closer the relationship of the victim to the perpetrator, the more certain is the loss of trust. This statement refers not simply to a biological relationship but to the emotional connection between the two. The more closely the child victim is tied to the abuser, the more the issue of trust comes into play. The victim of incestuous abuse has to deal not only with the results of a physical act, but the devastation of his ability to trust. If he cannot trust those closest to him, how can it be safe to trust anyone? The ability to trust (and to rebuild after its destruction) is a key issue for survivors.

Topic 3

COPING MECHANISMS / SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What coping mechanisms have you used in your life?

What has been hurtful?

What has been helpful?

What needs to change?

Focus

Examining Your Survival Strategies

Coping methods can be healthy and positive or injurious and addictive. Any repeated behaviour bears some examination. Here are four questions to ask yourself to help determine whether what you are doing is what you want to be doing:

- 1 / How did I feel afterward?

- 2 / Has it helped make my life more satisfying?

- 3 / What have I seen other people do in similar situations?

- 4 / What are some other options I might try?

Trying new strategies doesn't commit you to the changes. You can always return to doing things the old way. But the more you explore options, the more you are free to take charge of your life.

Topic 4

SECRECY - SHAME - GUILT

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

How have you/are you overcoming secrecy:

- from your past / in your life now?

- Do you feel shame/embarrassment? Guilt/humiliation?

Perpetrators of sexual child abuse must silence their victims in order to keep them powerless and allow the abusive behaviour to continue. Many survivors carry memories of raised voices inaugurating a cycle that led to their being sexually exploited. In adulthood if they speak loudly, they feel as though they are being abusive. When someone else raises his or her voice, the situation feels dangerously out of control.

There is a phenomenon that is so common that I try to be alert to it when talking with a new client. Although I know of no research about its frequency, when I mention it to others who work with abuse recovery, they recognise it instantly.

It is so familiar that I've named it. I call it "The Voice".

An important aspect of recovery is finding your authentic, full voice, literally and symbolically. You may need to spend time regaining your ability to yell. (If the prospect of shouting terrifies you, it is almost certainly called for.) You can start by speaking with your full voice when you are alone at home. Try a shout or two in the shower.

After growing more comfortable with expressing your voice, you will find that your everyday speech is stronger and more confident. Finally, you will find a forum for your voice. It may be expressed in helping others to recover their voices, or simply by making your voice heard more powerfully in every aspect of your life. However you choose to do it, I encourage and celebrate your moving ahead with your recover—at full voice.

Topic 5

TELL YOUR STORY

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

**What encourages you to tell your story -
to share your experiences/feelings?**

And - what stops you from opening up?

When you first break silence about the abuse, you will experience powerful and conflicting emotions. You may feel frightened that you (or someone you love) will be hurt. You are likely to think of yourself as having betrayed someone close to you. Disclosure can feel like weakness of character. You may feel as though you are falling apart or going crazy. You may have panic attacks or fall prey to periods of worry. You may struggle with bouts of depression. Changing the pattern of secrecy that you have depended on for so long can leave you confused and disoriented. Disclosure is no picnic. But these effects are temporary. Gradually as you tell more and more of your story, as more emotions become available, and as your isolation is replaced by healthy interaction, healing progresses. You see that change is possible. As your self-esteem increases, you accept the possibility of something that had only seemed available to others: Hope. The process is often slow and takes a long time; there are setbacks. But overall growth is consistent and the rewards are real. It all begins with breaking the secrecy.

Topic 6

SELF ESTEEM

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What destroys your self esteem?
What builds your self esteem?

How often I look outside myself for approval! The project at work is successful, but my good feelings depend on having that success acknowledged. The meal I fix at home is not as tasty when no one compliments the cook. I resent the favours I do for people when they neglect to thank me.

We all need an occasional pat on the back. But when the applause of others becomes the reason for my behaviour and necessary for me to feel satisfied, then I have given them power over me. People may forget to notice the terrific things that I've done or may not be comfortable praising me. I don't have to take it personally. Self-pity and resentment are not my only options. If I can learn to evaluate my own actions and behaviour and to value my own judgment, then the approval of others will be enjoyable, but no longer essential to my serenity.

Today's Reminder

Just for today, I will appreciate myself. I will not look to others for approval; I will provide it for myself. I'll allow myself to recognize that I am doing the best I can. Today my best is good enough.

“Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart.”

- Carl Jung

Topic 7

RELATIONSHIPS & TRUST

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What increases trust in my relationships?

What prevents trust in my relationships?

I'm learning that it is safe to be myself. Today I share with friends embarrassing secrets I once would have buried from sight. Sometimes I have to fight the old urge to keep quiet at all costs, but I have found that sharing is the key to healing.

For example, I was embarrassed about my physical appearance, especially about my smile. Years of humiliating criticisms and abuse had left me feeling very insecure. It seemed best to reveal as little about myself as possible, and I avoided some situations altogether. Unfortunately, I continued to believe the criticisms, so I thought very badly of myself.

By sharing honestly with people I can trust, I challenge the old, negative ideas. My friends assure me that the criticisms and hurts were exaggerated and can heal. Nobody seems to find me unworthy. I can come out of hiding. I'm even free to break into a grin.

Today's Reminder

Even when I can't trust myself, a trusted friend can help me see my situation in a different light. With their help, if I'm willing to permit it, the truth will set me free.

“You will get to the point where your demons, which are terrifying, get smaller and smaller and you get bigger and bigger.”

- August Wilson

Topic 8

BOUNDARIES

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

How can I say what I mean, without sounding mean when I say it?

Are you afraid to say “No”?

Are you afraid to speak your truth when others might disagree?

When feeling intimidated or triggered, can you walk away?

Many of us are confused when we first reach out for help. We are so focused on other people that we may not be able to see where they leave off and we begin. We've lost our sense of what is appropriate. How can we distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour when we don't even know what we want or need?

Looking at my own life helped me discover who I am, what my values are, the behaviour I'd like to keep, and the things I'd like to change. With this in mind, I am working to establish new behaviour that reflects my integrity and expresses my true values. Where in the past I have allowed unacceptable behaviour I now can choose a different response. I must consistently do what I say I'm going to do. Today I have the courage and faith to be true to myself, whether or not others like or agree with me. I must remember that announcing my new ways to others is not nearly as important as knowing what my own limits are and acting accordingly.

Today's Reminder

I will remember that knowing my boundaries does not mean forcing others to change; it means that I know my own limits and take care of myself by respecting them. The focus, today, is on me.

“He that respects himself is safe from others; he wears a coat of mail that none can pierce.”

- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Topic 9

ANGER

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

How can you express anger safely?

How can you use the “energy” of anger creatively?

What feelings are underneath your anger?

It seems to me that many of us deal with our anger in inappropriate ways. Denying it, we stuff it, or we go off in fury, directing the feelings outward. I, for one, opt for avoidance of any conflict, and then I turn into a doormat.

Peer support encourages me to acknowledge my feelings and to be responsible for how I express them. The problem is not that I get angry, but that I do not know how to direct my anger appropriately.

Lately, when I feel like hitting somebody, I take my pillow and beat the daylights out of my bed. When I want to wipe someone out, I attack my dirty oven. I try to release my anger as soon as I can so that I won't build resentments that will be harder to get rid of later.

I'm learning to communicate my anger too. I may not do it gracefully, and my words may not be well received. It means facing the awful discomfort called conflict, but I can't run away any more.

Today's Reminder

Feeling our feelings is one important part of the recovery process. Learning how to balance feelings with appropriate action is another

“When angry, count ten before you speak; if very angry, a hundred.”

- Thomas Jefferson

Topic 10

MASCULINITY & GENDER

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

How were you “conditioned as a boy” to “act as a man”?

What emotions were you “allowed” to express “as a boy”,

and what “range of human emotions” do you want to “express now”?

Human babies, male and female, are born with equal capacity for feeling and expressing the full range of human emotion. Shortly after birth, however, adults begin the process of teaching children the ways of their culture. Much of this training is unconscious, the adults not even realising they are teaching the child (by their words and behaviour) what is considered appropriate to their group. Part of this training (anthropologists call it enculturation) including learning the different ways men and women are supposed to behave. All societies differentiate between behaviours and roles they consider “male” and those they consider “female”. Specific definitions of masculine and feminine, however, vary tremendously from culture to culture. Behaviour and personality traits considered masculine in one society would be thought of as feminine in another and as gender neutral in yet another.

Topic 11

FORGIVING / LETTING GO

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What does forgiveness mean to you?

How can we let go of the hurt?

How do you prepare yourself to speak to the person who abused you?

And who is safe to “open up” to?

The most frequent form of advice is some variation of “You need to learn to forgive” or “It happened so long ago, why can’t you just put it behind you?”. They truly believe they have the best interests of the survivor at heart, but they are doing the emotional equivalent of telling someone who was bitten by a rabid dog, “If you just ignore it, it will go away”. Not only does this response reflect a total lack of understanding of the ongoing effects of abuse, it delivers a clear message to the survivor. Aware of the listener’s discomfort, he receives confirmation that what was done to him was so horrible and disgusting that he had better keep his mouth shut about it or he will drive everyone away. As a child he learned to pretend and protect the feelings of others; as an adult he is certain that he must continue the pretence. No one, he feels, could stand knowing who he really is. The inability of his listeners to tolerate his story and his feelings is seen as evidence that **he** is intolerable.

Take your time. Don’t rush to forgive. Whether or not forgiveness will ever be relevant, it is not appropriate in the early stages of recovery. There is too much work to do first. Part of that work involves identifying your feelings about the abuse *and the abuser*, and allowing yourself to feel the hurt, fear and humiliation. As you recognise the unfairness of your childhood—in the course of regaining your power—you will probably need to express outrage at what was done to you and at the individuals who were responsible. These initial steps cannot be taken in an atmosphere of forgiveness. If forgiveness is to come, there is time for it . . . later. For now, you have other priorities.

Topic 12

MOVING ON

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

(• Safety • Self Care • Building a Support Network)

- **How do I keep myself safe?**
- **How do I take care of me?**
- **How do I build a support network?**

It's time I started being nicer to myself. The voices in my head that tell me I'm not good enough do not speak the truth; they merely reflect the damaged self esteem that results from being abused. When I recognise that fact, I can tell them to be quiet! I will no longer listen to them!

My healing process has given me gentler, more loving ways. These remind me that I am lovable and I can learn to love myself. When I open my mind and heart enough to hear that message, I can begin to hear and feel all the other wonderful sounds of life, and sometimes the abusive thoughts vanish.

Today's Reminder

Treating myself with kindness and respect helps me to challenge my own self-criticism. Today I will pay particular attention to any voice that speaks lovingly in my life.

“We need to learn to live, to focus on something good or useful to our lives and let the rest of the world go about its business.”

- How Can I Help My Children?

Topic 13

SURRENDER

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What does “surrender to self” mean to you?

How can I let go of an old habit - emotional pattern - old reaction?

How can I change my harmful behaviours?

It's only natural to want a quick fix or an immediate solution to a difficult situation. Do I have some discomfort or a problem in my life? Let me fix it, or be rid of it now. Is it a situation I've lived with for twenty years? Fine, I'll give it fifteen minutes. Perhaps I've lived with it all my life—well then, an hour, maybe even two, Is it connected with childhood abuse? Do its roots run really deep in the ground of my being? In that case, I'll make a few phone calls and share at a meeting.

Is it still hanging on? Very well, I'll launch a major campaign of self-criticism. What's *wrong* with me? Why do I have all these feelings about something that isn't important? I'm sure I caused all this myself; somehow I'm to blame.

Today's Reminder

Willpower cannot eliminate in a day troubles that have taken root and flourished in my life for decades. Things take time.

***“You cannot create a statue by smashing the marble with a hammer,
and you cannot by force of arms release the spirit or the soul of
man.”***

- Confucius

Topic 14

HOPES AND GOALS

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What does hope mean to me?

What are hopes for my life / future?

How do I open myself to change; and taking new actions?

There have been days when many of us felt that good times would never come again. After so many disappointments, it seemed too painful to continue to hope. We shut our hearts and minds to our dreams and stopped expecting to find happiness. We weren't happy, but at least we wouldn't be let down anymore.

Caring, hoping, wanting—these are risky. but as we recover from the effects of abuse we may find that the risks are worth taking. In time, it may not be enough to simply avoid disappointment; we want more; we want rich, full exciting lives with joy as well as sorrow. Just finding the willingness to believe that joy can exist in our lives today can be very challenging, but until we make room in our hearts for good times, we may not recognise them when they arrive.

Nobody is happy all the time, but all of us are capable of feeling good. We deserve to allow ourselves to experience every bit of joy life has to offer.

Today's Reminder

I will not let fear of disappointment prevent me from enjoying this day. I have a great capacity for happiness.

“I want to grow in my willingness to make room in my life for good times, having faith in their arrival and patience in my anticipation.”

- Living with Sobriety

Topic 15

SELF BELIEFS AND FAITH

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What does faith mean to you?

Where do my beliefs come from?

How can I change my self beliefs?

When I'm troubled by another person's behaviour, a complicated situation, or a disappointing turn of events, I don't have to take it personally. I'm not a victim of everything that happens unless I choose to see myself that way. Though things don't always go my way, I can accept what I cannot change, and change what I can.

Perhaps I can take a different view of my problems. If I accept them at face value without taking them personally, I may find that they are not problems at all, only things that have not gone as I would have liked. This change of attitude can help free me to evaluate the situation realistically and move forward constructively.

Today's Reminder

Blaming my discomfort on outside events can be a way to avoid facing the real cause—my own attitudes. I can see myself as a victim, or I can accept what is happening in my life and take responsibility for my response. I may be guided to take action or to sit still, but when I listen to the guidance of my inner voice I will no longer be the victim of my circumstances.

“God asks no man whether he will accept life. That is not the choice. You must take it. The only choice is how.”

- Henry Ward Beecher

Topic 16

HONESTY AND COURAGE

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

How do I overcome “fear of being honest” to open up?

When is it safe to be honest? To speak my truth?

How can I encourage another person to be honest with me?

I will dare to be myself. I may be tempted to paste a smile on my face even though I am angry, in order to please another person. When turning down an invitation, I may want to make excuses so that nobody will be hurt. I may be inclined to cancel plans that I care about, without protest, because a loved one prefers to stay home and I don't want to make waves. These may be perfectly acceptable choices, and I may opt for any or all of them. But today I will be honest with myself as I do so—I will not pretend to feel what I do not feel or to want what I do not want.

Peer support does not tell me how to behave. It doesn't legislate right or wrong choices. Encouragement can help me look searchingly and fearlessly at myself, my feelings, motives, and actions. I can only learn to love myself if I am willing to learn who I am.

Today's Reminder

I have a right to want what I want and to feel the way I feel. I may not choose to act on those feelings or desires, but I won't hide them from myself. They are part of me.

“This above all: to thine own self be true.”

- William Shakespeare

Topic 17

INTEGRITY & TRUTHFULNESS

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

Being truthful - Increases my integrity?

Being truthful - Decreases fear?

Can you admit reactive behaviours where you have hurt other people?

How have you been hurt?

Having fear reduced or eliminated and having economic circumstances improve, are two different things. When I was new in recovery I had those two ideas confused—I thought fear would leave me only when I started making money. However, another line jumped off the page at me, when I was chewing on my financial difficulties: For us material well-being always followed spiritual progress, it never preceded.

Suddenly I understood that this promise was a guarantee. I saw that it put priorities in order and speaking my truth increased spiritual progress and emotional wellness would diminish the terrible fear of being destitute, just as it diminished many other fears.

Today I try to use the talents I have been given to benefit others—I've found that is what others valued all along. I try to remember that I no longer work for myself—I only get the use of the wealth I have been given—I have never "owned it". My life's purpose is much clearer when I just work to help, not to possess - people, places and things.

Topic 18

ACCEPTANCE OF SELF AND OTHERS

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What do I find difficult to accept within myself?

What do I find difficult to accept about other people?

In dealing with a trigger, a problem, or a challenge, awareness is often followed by a period of acceptance before we can take action. This process is sometimes referred to as the “Three As”— Awareness, Acceptance, and Action.

Coping with a new awareness can be extremely awkward, and most of us are eager to spare ourselves pain or discomfort. Yet, until we accept the reality with which we have been faced, we probably won’t be capable of taking effective action with confidence.

Still, we may hesitate to accept an unpleasant reality because we feel that by accepting, we condone something that is intolerable. This is not the case. “Acceptance does not mean submission to a degrading situation. It means accepting the fact of a situation, then deciding what we will do about it.” Acceptance can be empowering because it makes choice possible.

Today’s Reminder

I will give myself time to accept my situation before I act or speak. Unforeseen options can become available when I accept what is.

“For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead”

- Thomas Jefferson

Topic 19

HUMILITY & VULNERABILITY

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

How can I open myself to others?

To be vulnerable in relationship enables trust to grow and flourish

- How can I become more vulnerable with others?

Why Join a Group?

Telling your story to a supportive, encouraging person establishes the basis of a trusting relationship. Beginning such an interaction, however tentatively, is an act of healing—in the best sense of the word it creates a therapeutic relationship. When you undertake this trusting relationship with a competent, caring professional counsellor, it becomes the foundation for forming other relations. When you learn that you can trust someone, and not have your vulnerability abused, it opens the possibility of establishing important ties with other people. As your relationship with your therapist deepens and strengthens, he should encourage you to widen your circle of trust and intimacy. As you feel stronger and more positive about yourself, you are more willing and better able to reach out. Each time you tell someone about the abuse—every time that information is respected—it is easier to feel welcome in the world. Participation in an adult survivors' recovery group is an important way to experience that welcome.

It is impossible to overstress the benefits of sharing your feelings and experiences with other survivors. There is no more powerful contradiction to isolation than telling your story to people who:

- Can listen to what you're saying (and are even *eager* to hear it)
- Believe you
- *Know* you're telling the truth about the abuse and its effects, *because they have had similar experiences*

Topic 20

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY THOUGHTS, WORDS AND ACTIONS

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

How do I harm myself and others with my behaviour?

What triggers these behaviours?

What coping strategies have I developed?

How do I acknowledge the effects of my behaviours on others?

I can be doing great in the world, applying myself at work with friends, family and community activities. Yet still find that things trigger me and I have a desire to disrupt my life.

My loved ones try to help but they cannot as I consistently push them away. I recognise the pain I am causing my loved ones, but when I am triggered my need for safety often comes first. I disappear to familiar behaviours and places for comfort.

Getting to understand and recognise my triggers I can learn to manage my anxiety and develop positive coping mechanisms that will improve my ability to be in healthy relationships.

“People are lonely because they build walls instead of bridges”

- Joseph Fort Newton

Topic 21

COMPASSION / KINDNESS TO OTHERS

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What does compassion mean to you?

Have you experienced compassion and mercy from other people?

I think the word “detachment” is often misunderstood. For me, detachment is the freedom to own what is mine and to allow others to own what is theirs.

This freedom allows me to keep my own identity and still love, care about, and identify with the feelings of others. In fact, I believe that the degree of our humanity can be measured by our ability to know another person’s pain and joy. I have been practicing the principles of acceptance to the best of my abilities for a long time. But when someone in the support group shares about having a difficult time, I can go right back to day one. I no longer live with that type of emotional pain, but I can feel theirs. I can identify without needing to remove their pain.

Today I don’t have to like everything my loved one says or does, and I don’t have to change them even when I think they are wrong. I continue to learn how to care without taking everything personally.

Today’s Reminder

I can detach and still love, still feel. I can learn to take care of my own business while allowing others to tend to theirs. Today I can detach without losing compassion.

“Love your neighbour, yet pull not down your hedge”

- George Herbert

Topic 22

PERSEVERANCE & VIGILANCE

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

“When I am emotionally disturbed, there is something that needs to change inside me!” - How do I change the way I feel inside me?

How do I know what action to take to create a better outcome?

Recovery is discipline that requires perseverance, patience, and consistency for the best results. Regular attendance at meetings and applying good principles to every part of the day lead to a fuller and more enjoyable life.

At times we see obvious results from our efforts, while at other times we reach plateaus and feel stuck. If we go on putting one foot in front of the other and continue to work the changes, we find that all plateaus eventually come to an end. Just when we reach the end of our patience, a doorway seems to open and we suddenly take a huge leap forward. We see that none of the time that passed was wasted; although we didn't know it, we were quietly absorbing the changes. Most of us find that the results are worth the wait.

Today's Reminder

Whether or not I see immediate benefits, today I choose to keep coming back.

“Patience is the key to paradise”

- Turkish proverb

Topic 23

CULTURE & SPIRITUALITY

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What culture do you identify with?

What does spirituality mean to you?

Do you have a spiritual belief system, or not?

A jogger was nearing the end of a run. Sand dunes on the left blocked his view of the beach beyond. Crossing the dunes would require extra effort after a long, tiring workout. Instead, he could opt to remain on the flat road that veered off to the right. Although the scenery was less appealing, the easier route was enticing. Past experience had taught him to avoid pushing himself too hard. Yet he loved the sight of the ocean.

The jogger hesitated. An inner nudge urged him toward the dunes, and he chose to respond to it. As the beach appeared, a spectacular sunset hovered above the crashing waves. Humility overwhelmed the runner when he realised that in his moment of hesitation, he had listened to his instinct and could see around blind corners.

Today's Reminder

Logic may dictate a certain course of action while my inner voice urges me in a different direction. I may have an easier time when I follow the dictates of logic, convenience or past experience, but am I cheating myself out of something much better?

“The intellect has little to do on the road to discovery. There comes a leap in consciousness, call it intuition or what you will, and the solution comes to you and you don't know how or why”

- Albert Einstein

Topic 24

SERVICE

PRESENTING QUESTIONS:

What does service mean to you?

Why would I choose to *give* to other people?

“I get to keep what I give away” - what does this mean?

The concept of giving without strings was hard to understand when I first came into peer support. I was suspicious when others wanted to help me. I thought, “What do they want in return” - but I soon learned the joy of helping another person, and I began to understand why they were there for me, in the beginning.

My attitude has changed and I wanted to help others - sometimes I became anxious, as I wanted them to know the joy of living, that life can be beautiful.

When my life is more connected with people in my day, and I can give service and love to others through acts of kindness, then I begin to feel a special richness that is hard to explain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Courage to Change - Bass and Davis
- Daily Reflections
- Facilitator Training Day Handout
- “Victims No Longer”— Mike Lew