

Social media Use in peer support

This guidance has been developed in recognition of the increased use of a range of social media platforms that are used across the sector and more widely. They have been written (as far as possible) from the perspective of use in peer support arrangements, but they may be useful in more general situations.

We most likely adopt different approaches to the different groups we are invited to join or set up and we should always bear this in mind. Research ([BACKLINKO](#)) shows the typical social media user interacts with 6 different platforms (from the very personal to the very professional!).

Did you know that 45% of people across the world use a form of social media? Or that on average people who use it do so for around 2.5 hours a day? ([LikeMind Media](#))

Skills for Care and Like Mind Media worked together in 2022 to develop a guide which offering tips and advice to help you make the most of social media when [recruiting care workers](#).

A number of reports, including the Office for National Statistics 2021 census warned of the 'digital divide'. It highlights that in 2018 around 5.3 million adults were still not using the internet.

How is this relevant to peer support?

We may be surprised (or not) that the principles of the positive use of social media channels are very much aligned with those of peer support. Families, friends, colleagues and contacts can be contacted in real time and responses instantaneous. Reaching out and providing a listening ear are all underpinning principles of peer support.

Given that we are likely to have a different attitude to a personal group than we would for a professional group, the following questions are intended to help us to review our approaches and attitudes to social media and consider its value to us in terms of learning and decision making.

Questions to consider

- Am I the instigator or an invitee?
- Is it an appropriate group for me to be part of?
- Do I need to discuss my involvement with anyone before I join?
- Is the group planning to have any terms of reference, expectations or codes of conduct or is it deliberately free from guidance?
- Will I be representing my own views or also those of others? Is this level of involvement appropriate to my role?
- Do I get involved enough, in the right way or too much?
- Do I feel that I and/or others benefit from my involvement.?
- Am I a group member in name only and simply watch notifications and absorb the information from the involvement of others?
- Do I only comment when I have something to comment on and am sure of my contribution in terms of accuracy and relevance?
- Am I proactive and like to comment on everything?
- Am I supportive and tend towards affirmation of contribution?
- Am I willing to contribute but always ensure that my points are neutral or for suggestion only to guard against inaccuracy or comeback?

Benefits of Social Media Channels

Many people have their favourite or preferred platforms. Below is a list of the more commonly used versions. Prior to starting or joining a group consider which platform is the most relevant and accessible for your purpose.

- **Facebook** is useful for longer and more personal posts and ongoing support groups e.g. Care Home Managers and individual employers
- **Twitter** is useful for short and snappy exchanges about issues that are current and re-tweeting is popular and useful for sharing national, regional and locally 'news'.
- **WhatsApp** useful for organising at short notice or for quick messaging. If you are a member of a largeish group consider whether it is helpful if you regularly post replies like 'no, sorry, can't help' – you may feel inclined to apologise for not knowing or not seeming to be helpful, but chances are the person asking is looking for an instant and positive response.
- **LinkedIn** has more of a business focus as the name implies by sharing and linking up business-focused individuals and services.
- **Instagram and YouTube** are ideal platforms for getting creative including image sharing and great for promoting innovation.
- **Zoom/MS Teams** are used widely for remote meetings of groups for the purposes of business-focussed activities and peer support. They became a primary means of communication at the height of the pandemic and have remained in wide use. Although introduced more widely to replace face-to-face activity, they have remained in use to enable remote briefing, discussion, ideas sharing and peer support (individually and between groups). In addition to the ability to see and hear others, there are also functions that enable the sharing of information, chat, and comment meaning that some of the wider considerations apply.

Top Tips

- **Think before you post** – your post could be seen by anyone. Are you representing yourself or your organisation? How will your peers react? If you are replying to someone's question, concern or even their distress how it will be received; is what you are posting accurate and helpful? Could it be misunderstood or misrepresented? Try the 'me' test – would I find my own response useful or supportive if I received it?
- **Think about who will see your post** – check your privacy settings but this may not prevent a more public audience seeing what you have sent.
- **Maintain appropriate professional standards of communication** – if you are a member of a 'private' group of peers respond in a style and content reflective of the role rather than in that of a 'friend' or family member. If you are also a registered professional check in with your registration body about its standards and expectations. If you are posting advice or sharing information it could be used as evidence for registration or a qualification. Some qualifications and registration processes require the inclusion of testimonials or peer reflections so this could be a real benefit. Always be mindful of the membership of your group – be clear about who your peers are. Some organisational groups include people with lived experiences who may also be benefiting from the support of your organisation. Be mindful of professional boundaries.
- **Do not post unique identifiers** – if you are trying to illustrate an issue, the use of live experiences to make a point may be beneficial but no personal or individual identifiers should be included. This could breach organisational policy as well as professional expectations.

- **Do not post offensive or inappropriate material** – doing so could contravene other legislation, including elements of criminal behaviour. Sometimes there can be a fine line between what is shared via informal groups and what is shared with professional peers. There have been some high-profile examples of where the lines have not only become blurred but seriously crossed. Do not use social media to harass peers for responses. If you need an answer and it is not forthcoming maybe try other sources, platforms or offline options.
- **Consider brief terms of engagement** – Some professional groups agree principles of use which may be in line with mandatory standards or organisational policy. Some groups prefer open and less regulated ‘terms’ to promote more freedom of exchange and dialogue. Be mindful of the type/s of group/s you belong to and check out with yourself and others that you are comfortable with its modus operandi. From a peer support perspective this will underpin the fairness, respect and dignity shown to each other as members.

Above all #Keeponposting

References

BACKLINKO, Social Network Usage & Growth Statistics: How Many People Use Social Media in 2023

LikeMind web site and any resources from Skills for Care work re attracting employees

Social Media Day information and Skills for Care Campaign (2021?)

Health and Social Care Professions (HCPC) regulator

ONS Social Media Use (from 2021 census)

