



**PROJECT AIR**  
A PERSONALITY DISORDERS STRATEGY

# Peer Support for People with Personality Disorder

**A 6-Session 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](mailto:info-projectair@uow.edu.au) or visit <https://www.projectairstrategy.org>

**Peer Support for People with Personality Disorder: A 6-Session Peer and Clinician Co-Facilitated Group Program – Participant Workbook**

**Manual Development Team:** Karlen R. Barr, Mahlie Jewell, Aoife M. Herrick, Jessica A. Giles, Michelle L. Townsend, & Brin F.S. Grenyer.

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The authors would like to acknowledge that Session Four: Creative Recovery Practices includes the program *Drawing for Distress Tolerance* by Mahlie Jewell (Jewell, 2019).

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For correspondence: Professor Brin Grenyer ([grenyer@uow.edu.au](mailto:grenyer@uow.edu.au))

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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 support individuals with lived experience of borderline personality disorder (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 support individuals with BPD to:

- Improve individual group members' capacity to manage their symptoms and improve functioning
- Provide individuals with BPD a respectful, comfortable space for sharing experiences with others
- Provide evidence based psychological education and skills development
- Provide opportunities for support including group members and facilitators learning from and with each other

The Peer Support Group Program is a 6-week structured program with a set topic for discussion each week.

<b>Session number</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Objectives</b>
1	Introduction to the Peer Support Group Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduction of facilitators and group members</li> <li>- Build rapport between facilitators and group members</li> <li>- Identify the goals of the Peer Support Group</li> <li>- Be aware of the group guidelines and boundaries</li> <li>- Foster respect and non-judgement in the group environment and rapport with other group members</li> </ul>
2	Self-Stigma and Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to build rapport between facilitators and group members</li> <li>- Introduce the biopsychosocial model of BPD</li> <li>- Introduce concept of self-stigma</li> <li>- Understand how self-stigma affects people</li> <li>- Understand that people living with BPD have strengths</li> </ul>
3	Self-Compassion and Self-Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to build rapport between facilitators and group members</li> <li>- Introduce concepts of self-compassion and self-care</li> <li>- Establish the importance of self-compassion and self-care</li> <li>- Highlight that the process of self-compassion and self-care will be unique for each individual</li> </ul>
4	Creative Recovery Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discuss experiences of different creative practices</li> <li>- Learn and try different creative practices</li> <li>- Discuss how creative practices can be used to support recovery</li> </ul>
5	Building My Best Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop understanding of what wellness and recovery personally means</li> <li>- Highlight the possibility of recovery</li> <li>- Discuss what group members can do to support themselves each day</li> <li>- Build a wellness toolkit</li> </ul>
6	Review of Program Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review topics group members have requested</li> <li>- Reflect upon group process and experiences</li> <li>- Reflect upon the benefits and challenges associated with attending the group program</li> </ul>

## 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:

Grounding, Mindfulness and Relaxation Exercise	10 minutes
Introduction to the Group Session	10 minutes
Reflections of Previous Session and Group Member Sharing	40 minutes
Short Break	10 minutes
Psychological Education, Skills Development, and Group Discussion	40 minutes
Debrief and Grounding/Mindfulness/Relaxation	10 minutes

NB: In session one, the sharing component is also replaced with an icebreaker activity.

## Group Guidelines and Boundaries

The Group Guidelines and Boundaries as agreed upon by the group:

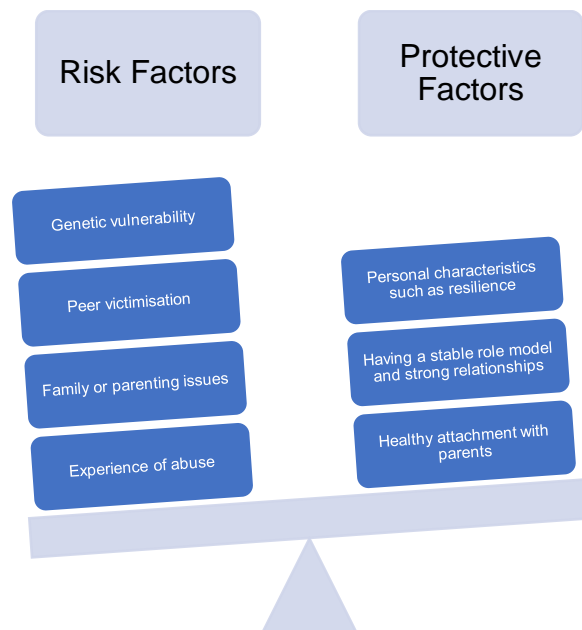
**Self-reflection: What do you want to get out of the peer support group?**



## Session Two: Self-Stigma and Strengths

### Development of BPD

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.



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

### Biopsychosocial model of BPD development

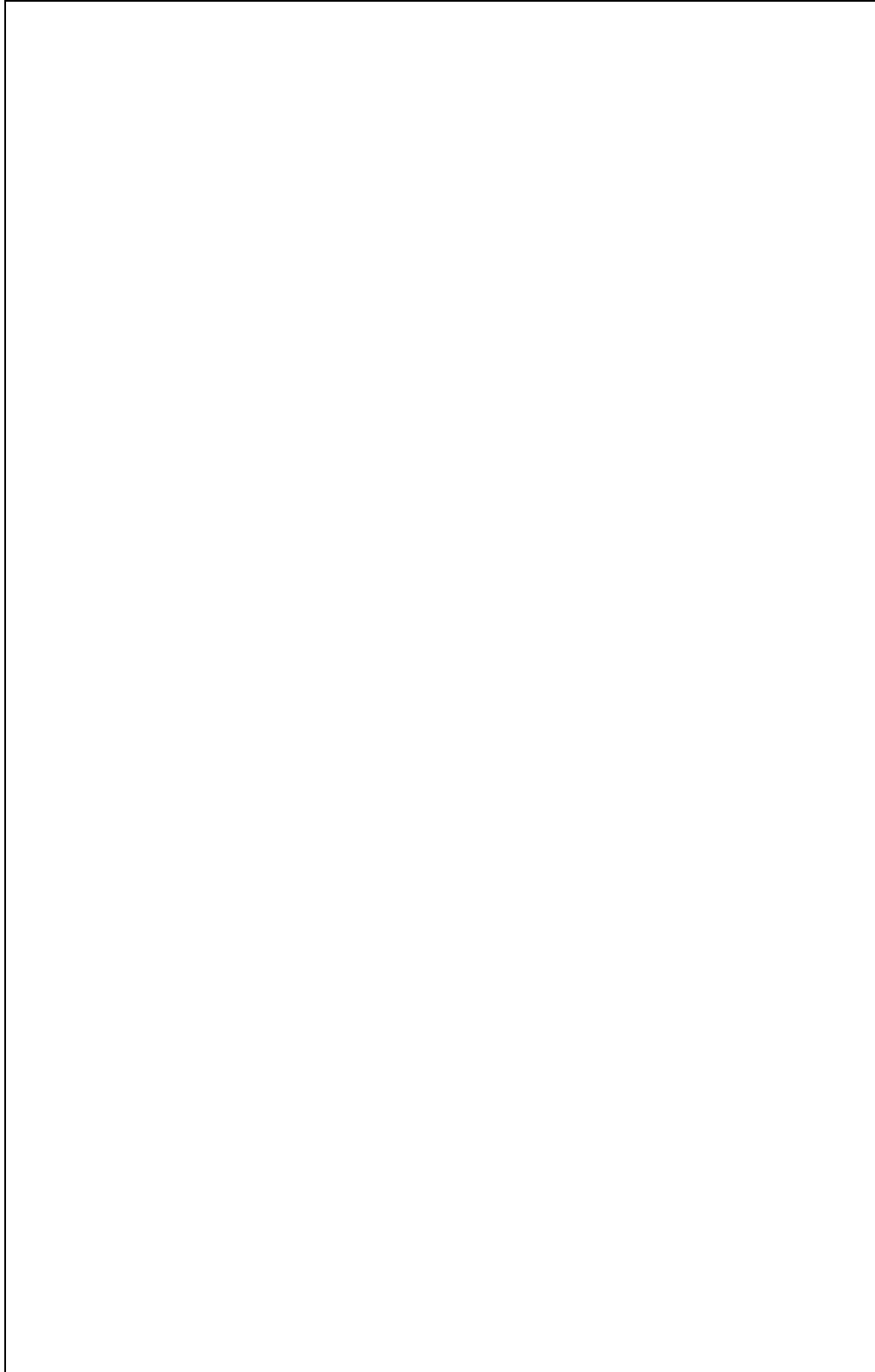
'Biopsychosocial' means many factors may contribute to personality disorder development. Factors which may contribute include biological factors and psychosocial experiences, such as adverse childhood experiences (actual or perceived). Therefore, no one factor causes personality disorder.

### What is Self-Stigma?

Self-stigma happens when someone becomes aware of stigma that others have about them and applies that stigma to oneself. Self-stigma includes perceptions and beliefs people have about themselves. External stigma is real and hurtful and self-stigma happens due to wider discrimination and rarely comes from internal intuition but from adopting the views of others. It's important to note that experiencing self-stigma is not a weakness of a person. When we hear messages, particularly from sources we trust like friends, family, mental health clinicians, those messages will sink in. It's similar to breathing in polluted air; you can't help but be affected.

## Discussion: How does self-stigma affect you?

**Discussion: What are some of the positives, strengths, and ‘superpowers’ you have as a person living with BPD?**



## Take Home Activity

Notice all of the ways/times when the strengths/positives/superpowers are in action during the week between sessions. You can write them in the box below.

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## Session Three: Self-Compassion and Self-Care

### Self-Compassion and Self-Care Can Change Our Brains

When we criticise ourselves, such as talking to ourselves negatively as we discussed last session, our brain and body respond. A part of our brain called the amygdala responds to threats in our environment, including self-criticism, and tells our body to prepare for the 'attack' by increasing a hormone called cortisol and we may experience things such as an increase in heart rate.

When we are compassionate towards ourselves, our levels of cortisol decrease. In addition, our brain releases the hormone oxytocin, which helps to increase our feelings of trust and calm. When we are compassionate to ourselves, our body responds the same as though we were receiving compassion from someone else because our brains and bodies experience it as the same thing. For example, our brain and body responds the same to a caress we give to ourselves and to a caress we receive from someone else. When we practise self-compassion and self-care, we can create new pathways in our brains which can increase our feelings of trust and calm, and help us to be compassionate to ourselves in the future.

### What is Self-Compassion?

Self-compassion is about seeing that everyone goes through pain and suffering, including ourselves. To have an attitude of self-compassion means being rational and kind to ourselves. When we're going through a difficult time, we allow ourselves to experience the painful feelings without judging ourselves – even though judging ourselves is so easy to do, it 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 wellbeing 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, a photo of something or someone you love, the flame of a candle, a flower, the waves in the ocean, or 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, use a scented body wash, or smell the ocean breeze.
4. *What you taste*
  - Chew or eat something that you love mindfully and slowly. 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, under a tree, or on your bed while watching, listening to, and smelling your surroundings, such as the ocean and the sand. Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing (if this feels comfortable) or visualising a relaxing scene. These activities may help you feel more alive and provide relief from your distress.

### Discussion: What do self-compassion and self-care mean to you?

### Discussion: How can you practise self-care?

### Take Home Activity

You can choose what activity you want to do this week related to self-compassion and self-care. For example, you might 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, you can share how you went with your activity 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 Four: Creative Recovery Practices

### Creative Practices

The following art practices are from the program *Drawing for Distress Tolerance* by Mahlie Jewell, Graphics for Good (Jewell, 2019). Resources regarding the *Drawing for Distress Tolerance* program can be found here <https://graphicsforgoodmj.wordpress.com/resources-for-lived-experience/> In addition, some of the art practices align with the theory and skills used in dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1993).

#### Art practices:

i. Continuous line

##### **Materials**

Positive images that group members can copy (e.g., appropriate, positive magazine or book images)

Sheet of paper

Coloured texta/pencils

##### **DBT Theory/Skills Used**

-Only suffering in the moment

-Turning the mind

-Wandering mind

##### **How It Works**

-Helps you focus and regulate emotions

-Challenges your brain to learn something new

-Steers your mind away from intrusive thoughts and 'pushes away' intrusive thoughts

##### **What to Do**

-Start with one colour

-Do not lift up texta/pencil

-Once you lift off you have to start again from the beginning

-Practise being non-judgemental of your new skills and outcome

ii. Positive Memory Bank

##### **Time**

As long as possible for this one.

##### **Materials**

Sheet of paper

Coloured texta/pencils

##### **DBT Theory/Skills Used**

-Accumulate positive memory

-Build mastery

-Turning the mind

-Reframing

-Check the facts



**How it Works**

- Helps us build mastery in putting energy into positive emotions and memory
- Turning the mind
- Good practice to do on a hard day, to celebrate what was positive within it

**What to Do**

- Draw one thing that was good about today whilst focusing on that memory.
- Add colour, written narrative and images that help you capture the moment
- Ask yourself “How much time do I spend focusing on positive memories? Do I need to spend more time doing this?”
- Find the beauty in the moment
- Keep these artworks as reminders – these can be perfect additions to self-soothe kits

iii. Repetitive Lines & Shapes

**Time**

Approximately 10 minutes

**Materials**

A5 sheet of paper  
Coloured texta/pencils

**DBT Theory/Skills Used**

Activity  
Contribution  
Comparison  
Emotions  
Pushing Away  
Thoughts  
Sensations

**How it Works**

- Can help you distract from negative thoughts
- Gives you lots of time for distress to come down
- Can be used in high distress
- You can do it anywhere
- Channel your feelings
- Helps you complete and celebrate a goal

**What to Do**

- Create one shape to start from
- Build around with same or similar shapes/lines
- Must fill the whole page

iv. Colour Challenge

**Time**

Take home

**Materials**

Sheet of paper  
Coloured texta/pencils

**How it Works**

- Challenges your brain to think positively
- Creates something for you to keep
- You can do it many times with new results

-Good gift for others

**What to Do**

-Find a positive message or image you can use

-Select three colours only

-Avoid the same colour touching

Music practices:


i. What do you hear

Listen to a piece of music. You can either stay silent or do something creative while listening, such as moulding dough, drawing, or humming. Next, write, journal, or draw what you noticed or felt while listening to the music and what you are noticing or feeling afterwards.

ii. Music that is important to me

Write down what songs are important to you and why. Write down how the song makes you feel and what lyrics or aspects of the song(s) resonate with you most.

**Discussion: How could you use creative practices to support wellness and recovery?**



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## Session Five: Building My Best Life

### What is wellness and recovery for people living with 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 recover 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 for people living with BPD is common; however it may require a lot of learning and commitment. Additionally, recovery is a non-linear process that may involve learning about what works for you, how to self-manage the emotions connected to BPD, and developing new communication and social skills and insight into your thoughts and feelings. Many people talk about recovery as being not a destination, that is, you may experience ups and downs - this is normal. Recovery is not about changing your personality.

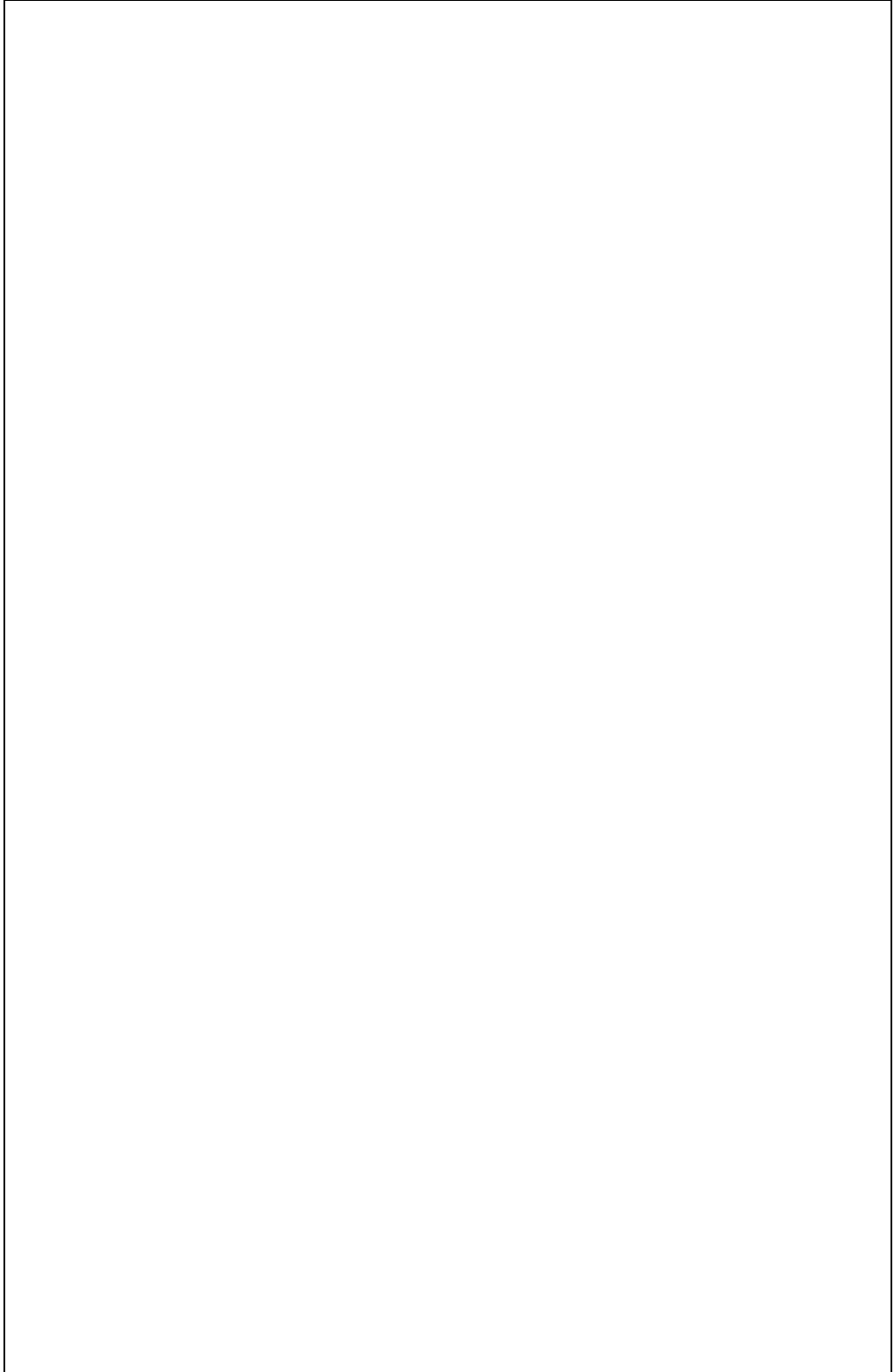
Understanding what wellness and recovery means to you and what you want for wellness and recovery is an important part of the process.

**Discussion: What do wellness and recovery mean to you?**

**Discussion: What can you do to support your progress every day?**

## Activity: Build a wellness toolkit

Draw or make a collage about your wellness toolkit. (This can be done here or on a separate piece of paper).



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## Session Six: 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:

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## Summary of Peer Support Group Program

### Session One: Introduction to the Peer Support Group Program

In this session, there was an introduction to the Peer Support Group Program and the group decided on the group guidelines and boundaries.

### Session Two: Self-Stigma and Strengths

In this session, the biopsychosocial model of BPD was explained. Also, the concept of self-stigma was explained and there was a discussion on how self-stigma affects group members. There was also a discussion about how people living with borderline personality disorder have strengths, and group members were encouraged to reflect upon their own strengths.

### Session Three: Self-Compassion and Self-Care

In this session, the concepts of self-compassion and self-care were explained, and group members were encouraged to practise a self-compassion or self-care activity.

### Session Four: Creative Recovery Practices

In this session, various creative practices that may support recovery were discussed and practised in session, including art practices and music practices.

### Session Five: Building My Best Life

In this session, the concepts of wellness and recovery were discussed in terms of what they personally mean. Different strategies to support wellbeing every day were discussed, and group members were encouraged to build a wellness toolkit.

### Session Six: Review of Program Sessions

In this session, any topics suggested by group members were discussed. Group members were provided an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences of the group, including benefits and challenges.



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## References

Jewell, M. (2019). *Drawing for distress tolerance*. Graphics for Good.

Linehan, M. M. (1993). *Cognitive-behavioral treatment of borderline personality disorder*. Guilford Press.