

TRANSACT Peer Support Project

Frequently Asked Questions

I don't understand what peer support is and how it's different from professional support?

Peer support is when people with a shared identity or experience come together and use this to support one another. At university, this shared identity or experience may simply be the fact you are a student. Being listened to and supported by another student who may have experienced similar challenges, can offer encouragement, hope and potential solutions, in a way that other, more formal support services may not.

In peer support everyone's experiences are treated as equally important, and the focus is on creating a space of acceptance and understanding.

What sorts of things can peer support help me with?

Peer support can provide a space to talk through a range of worries. This might include worries related to your course, practical issues at university (such as financial, or living issues), social or relationship problems, or mental health difficulties.

Peer supporters will give you the time and space to talk about whatever is on your mind. Although they can't advise you about what to do, they might share how they have coped with similar challenges or suggest other services and support that might be able to help.

In our experience students use peer support for a variety of different reasons but often because they are undecided about seeking support through more formal channels (such as through university services or their doctor) or perhaps they are not sure what other support is available and where to start.

What training do peer supporters have?

Students involved in the TRANSACT project have been through a recruitment and selection process and have received training in how to provide peer support safely and effectively.

In preparation for the role, students go through more than 18 hours of training that includes:

- Understanding the core values of peer support and why these are important.
- Knowing when and how to use their own experiences when providing support.
- How to build effective relationships through empathetic and active listening skills and what can get in the way of relationship building.
- How to provide support safely, including the importance of and limits to confidentiality, and what to do if they are worried about someone's safety.
- Understanding what other support is available, through the university, health service and wider community, and how to signpost to these.

I'm worried that what I say will be shared with others. Is the support confidential?

What you tell a peer supporter is kept confidential within the peer support team. What this means is that a peer supporter might talk about a session they have had with a senior peer supporter in their supervision. They might do this as part of a general debrief on how their peer support shift went, or maybe they want to discuss how they managed a situation as part of learning and development. It's important that peer supporters have a space to reflect and learn on their experiences providing support.

What you share with a peer supporter is not normally shared beyond supervision sessions. The only exception to this is if there are concerns about your **immediate safety** and you are unable or unwilling to seek support for yourself. In this situation, we may need to break confidentiality and go through UCL's [student of concern](#) process. However, the peer supporter will let you know if they are worried and think they might need to break confidentiality. Before any steps are taken to break confidentiality, a peer supporter is required to consult with a senior peer supporter or the peer support staff team.

Do you take notes or keep a record of contacts?

We keep a brief record of contacts that captures some basic information about the session, such as how long it lasted, broad categorisation of what issues were discussed and what was offered (e.g. signposting to other services). Data captured is anonymous and no identifying details are recorded. This data is then used to help us understand how students are using peer support and ways we can improve the service to best meet the needs of students.

Do I have to use all the time allocated?

No, you don't have to use all the time allocated. There is no average length of a session. Some contacts can be as short as 15-20 minutes, others may use the full 50 minutes. It's good to be aware that if the peer supporter has another session booked after yours, they will need to bring things to a close after 50-60 minutes so they have time to prepare for speaking to the next student.

Can I book multiple sessions?

You are not limited to booking one peer support session. You can book in another session if you feel that would be helpful. This could be with the same peer supporter or with someone different.

What if I can no longer make the session?

We understand that sometimes things happen and you may not be able to join a booked session as planned. This is ok. Wherever possible, we ask that you let us know by using the cancellation/change options at the bottom of your booking confirmation email. This will allow another student to book a session in the cancelled slot.

Is it possible to meet up with peer supporters socially?

Maintaining appropriate boundaries is an important part of providing peer support safely – for the benefit of both you and the peer supporter. It is not possible to meet peer supporters socially outside of the booked sessions.

We appreciate that students can sometimes feel lonely or socially isolated, especially when adjusting to university life. If you are struggling to connect with other students, a peer support group may be a good way to meet other students and our peer supporters will also help you explore ways to meet people.