

## Peer support during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

Peer supporters work in a range of roles, providing emotional support, help with education, violence reduction, resettlement work, health advice, and advocacy. While peer support may come under pressure, or have to be modified or paused, during the Coronavirus, it is important wherever possible to maintain schemes, as they can provide a vital lifeline for those in need.



### Supporting peer workers

Make sure they are aware of - and follow - the latest COVID-19 guidance so they do not put themselves or others at risk through their activities.

Provide support to individual peer workers. Just because someone is a peer worker doesn't mean they won't be distressed or finding things hard themselves.

If your establishment runs a Listener scheme, calls to the local Samaritans branch manager should be facilitated flexibly and at no cost to the Listeners. Calls must be unmonitored to maintain confidentiality.

Governors who decide to operate outside the usual limits on the services provided by peer supporters (PSI 17/2015) must ensure that the risks of doing so are identified and mitigated where possible. This must be recorded in the defensible decision making log.

### Continuing during reduced regime

Measures restricting free movement may impact on confidentiality and people's willingness to ask for support when they need it.

There should be a discreet way that people can ask for peer support. Suggestions include prompt cards which prisoners can write on discreetly.

For people in isolation, communication with a peer worker through the cell door should be considered, though care should be taken to ensure that this cannot be overheard.

Consider measures such as a laminated piece of paper and a whiteboard marker - if the peer worker is provided with gloves, this can be passed under the door, as a discreet channel of communication, with the risk of infection minimised.

### When peer support can't work

There may be times during a reduced regime when it is no longer practical to run peer support. Where possible, support peer workers to consider whether they can give guidance or support remotely (for example, for literacy peer workers, setting simple reading exercises).

Any decision to alter access to peer support must involve communication with partners involved in running them (such as Samaritans for Listeners schemes).

At this time, things will be difficult and more stressful for a lot of people. People should be reassured that this is a normal reaction.

Samaritans is available 24/7 through in-cell telephony and with the new phones that are being provided to prisoners.

Encourage prisoners to use this resource - even if they never have done before.

CONTACT US: [safecustodypoliceandlearning@justice.gov.uk](mailto:safecustodypoliceandlearning@justice.gov.uk)  
Have you seen our intranet page? Visit us at <https://intranet.noms.gsi.gov.uk/support/safety/> or find us via the 'Support' tab on the Intranet

### Further information

Call Samaritans: 0845 450 7797 (free from PIN phones, mobiles and landlines)

Peer support in prisons: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/peer-support-in-prison>