



START HERE: **Peer Support During a Pandemic**

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‘Trauma’ has become one of the most over-utilized and misrepresented words in the mental health and peer support fields. Being ‘trauma-informed’ is based on a framework of understanding of trauma responses that focuses on the physical, psychological and emotional safety for survivors. Trauma informed support and peer support may be similar as they both work to rebuild a sense of control and resilience but take separate approaches to care.

It is important to know the difference.

During a pandemic it is critical to have an understanding that loss, grief and trauma are vastly different and require some understanding prior to providing effective peer support. Although we are all experiencing a unified global event, our experiences, exposure and responses are individual to an abnormal event. Even when exposed to similar experiences (i.e. job loss), our perspectives, reactions and coping mechanisms can be unique to each individual and therefore require independent considerations.

Prior to opening the Infographic and Guide to Peer Support During a Pandemic, take a moment to learn the various forms of impact a pandemic may have on an individual or group.

Loss: Loss can be defined as having something or someone taken away from you. During a pandemic, a sense of loss can come from losing your job, losing a loved one to the Covid-19 virus, loss of a dream/vision or a loss of income from job security or financial investments.

Grief: Grief is the reaction that stems from loss. There are several stages of grief that range from shock, denial, pain, guilt, loneliness to rebuilding, acceptance and hope. Grief does not work on a spectrum of growth and healing but may take various forms of revisiting emotions and preprocessing for healing.

Trauma: Trauma is a psychological and emotional response to an event/experience that is incredibly disturbing and distressing. Trauma may come from a single incident (i.e. car accident), repeated and prolonged experiences (i.e. domestic violence) or complex in nature due to varied and multiple traumatic events which may be invasive and interpersonal in nature (i.e. medical staff exposed to multiple cases of physical injury).

Under pandemic circumstances loss, grief and trauma may have varying reactions because although people are unified in their experiences (i.e. significant global job loss) their reactions may vary, dependent on other external circumstances (i.e. financial stability) which will impact how a person copes with the circumstance. Cumulative exposure to stressors also have an impact on a person's wellbeing.

Know the difference.

Although we may have shared experiences does not mean that we understand an individual state of being.

Leave the in-depth psychological / therapeutic supports to the specialists (i.e. physicians, psychotherapists, psychologists, psychiatrists, etc).

Effective Peer Support during a pandemic must be simple.

- **Be an active listener.**
- **Watch for cues.**
- **Provide list of other supports.**
- **Let someone know they are not alone.**

If you or someone you know needs help, there are supports in Canada.

- Crisis Services Canada: Call 24/7 → 1-833-456-4566
 - or text (between 4pm to midnight EST) to 45645
- Badge of Life Canada (Police & Correctional Personnel)
 - www.badgeoflifecanada.org
- Hope for Wellness Helpline (Indigenous Peoples of Canada) 1-855-242-3310
 - www.hopeforwellness.ca