



Perinatal Wellbeing Ontario

Support Education
Community Advocacy

PEER SUPPORT DROP-IN GROUPS: PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND INFORMED CONSENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY

PWO offers a bi-weekly Drop-in Peer Support Group for parents seeking peer support in a group setting. The aim of the group is for peers to provide and receive support around Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders, challenges with parenting and other challenges that present in the perinatal period. PWO facilitates a group that is welcoming, non-judgemental, and compassionate in order to be able to share authentically about our struggles. All peer support groups are co-facilitated by 2 Peer Support Volunteers.

Our peer support groups are meant to provide support in addition to any professional supports you access and are not meant to be in place of a therapeutic support group, individual therapy or support from a healthcare practitioner. We encourage all our peers to explore a treatment plan that is holistic in approach including mental health therapy, medication, and lifestyle interventions, to name a few.

Informed Consent to Peer Support Group

Welcome to Perinatal Wellbeing Ontario Incorporated. The Founder and Director of Perinatal Wellbeing Ontario Incorporated, Christine Cunningham, BA, SSW, R.S.S.W. is a registered member of the Ontario College of Social Work and Social Service Workers (#825612). Perinatal Wellbeing Ontario provides peer support to people in the perinatal period. Perinatal Wellbeing Ontario Incorporated, and all of its employees and volunteers adhere to policies and procedures in compliance with the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Document Act, 2004 (PIPEDA) and the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004 (PHIPA).

For the purposes of this agreement “client” will refer to peer.

Perinatal Wellbeing Ontario Incorporated believes it is important to have your informed consent before beginning peer support. By reviewing the information presented below, you will be informed about our peer support process, personal information handling, client record management, and electronic communication policy. Consent must be given voluntarily and knowingly. You have the right to change your mind and withdraw informed consent at any time.

Peer Support Process:

Our peer support programs are meant to be an aid in recovery; they are not meant to replace mental health therapy or medical care. A combination of treatments, including medical evaluation and care, mental health therapy, and group support, can accelerate the recovery process, and we encourage participants to pursue all approaches. Perinatal Wellbeing Ontario Incorporated does not provide mental health evaluations of any kind, and our services are not meant to be a substitute for mental health therapy or medical treatment.

Confidentiality:

The content of all individual and group peer support sessions is considered to be strictly confidential. Both verbal information and written records about a client cannot be divulged by a peer support worker to be shared with any other party without the written consent of the client or the client's legal guardian. At any time, you have the right to withhold or withdraw consent, or place conditions on the disclosure of your information. Our organization is committed to protecting the privacy of your personal information and has developed policies and procedures in compliance with the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Document Act, 2004 (PIPEDA) and the Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004 (PHIPA).

For the Online Drop-in Peer Support Group we collect the following information: name and email address. Staff and volunteers do not document drop-in group meetings as case notes. We do not create an electronic record to store your information for the Online Drop-in Peer Support Group

There are exceptional situations where we are ethically, professionally, and/or legally required to share information about you and/or your situation without your written consent. These situations include the following:

1. If we have information about the abuse or risk of abuse and/or neglect to a child (a child is a person who is, or appears to be, under the age of 16 years. It also applies to children subject to a child protection order who are 16 and 17 years old) then we must report this information to the appropriate authorities. Abuse includes but is not limited to physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, and/or neglect.
2. If we have concern about any risk that you may harm another person or yourself then we are obligated to ensure your safety and the safety of others by informing the appropriate services and/or individuals.
3. If we are compelled by law to release information, such as receiving a subpoena to court.

We only retain personal data for as long as is necessary for us to render a service you have requested or to which you have given your consent, except where otherwise provided by law (e.g. in connection with pending litigation).

Emergency or Crisis Policy:

Please note that our services do not provide emergency or crisis support. In the event of crisis, emergencies, or the need for immediate emotional support, please contact a Mental Health Crisis line (such as Crisis Services Canada by phone 1-833-456-4566 or by text 45645), call 911, or go to your nearest emergency room. Please note, we do not regularly check our email, nor do we respond immediately, so these methods should not be used if there is an emergency.

Electronic Communication and Online Confidentiality Policy:

Many of these common modes of communication such as email, or text messaging put your privacy at risk and can be inconsistent with the law and with the standards of The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. Consequently, this policy has been prepared to assure the security and confidentiality of your peer support and to assure that it is consistent with ethics and the law. If you have any questions about this policy, please feel free to discuss this with us.

We use email communication only with your permission. We use a secure video platform through Grow With Treehouse to facilitate our online peer support groups.

We use social media to connect with the community and we can be contacted through social media. Our Facebook group exists in order to provide people with peer support. This is not a crisis service and should not be used as such. Your confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when you use social media to connect with us.

We have a legal and ethical responsibility to make our best efforts to protect all communications that are a part of our online peer support programs. Grow With Treehouse is a private and confidential video conferencing service that has an encrypted connection and is both PHIPA (Personal Health Information Protection Act) and HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996) compliant. However, the nature of electronic communications technologies is such that we cannot guarantee that our communications will be kept confidential or that other people may not gain access to our communications. You should also take reasonable steps to ensure the security of our communications (for example, only using secure networks for online peer support sessions and having passwords to protect the device you use for online peer support). Please let us know if you have any questions about exceptions to confidentiality.

As a peer participating in PWO's Online Peer Support Drop-in Group I agree to the following:

- I will be respectful of personal boundaries and will not engage in a social relationship with a peer volunteer outside of PWO peer support programs. This includes exchanging phone numbers, personal emails, or adding each other on personal social media accounts
- I understand that if I email any PWO staff member or volunteer, they will respond when they are available, and that Peer Support Volunteers, members, or staff of PWO do not provide crisis support
- I will let the Peer Support Coordinator, peersupport@perinatalwellbeing.ca, know if I am no longer interested in participating in the program

Statement of Informed Consent

I have read and fully understand the information contained in this document. I understand that I can ask any PWO staff or Peer Volunteer any and all questions I have regarding the contents of this document. By attending the online drop-in group peer support I agree to the above.