

## **Peer Support Group Guidelines**

### ***Virtual Open Groups***

We follow a set of group guidelines to ensure everyone can participate fully and without distraction. They bring clarity to our intentions for the group and aim to create a safe, supportive, and respectful space where everyone's grief experience is heard and valued. We all have a role to play in ensuring this happens, so we ask you to follow each of these guidelines for the duration of the group.

- Find a quiet, private place to participate and use headphones if there are others in the vicinity
- Plug in your device so you don't run out of power during the group
- Eliminate distractions, close other programs/apps and windows on your device
- Turn off all notifications and make sure your cell phone is on silent

**In addition to the above guidelines specific and crucial to virtual support group meetings, please review the following guidelines BFO-MR has in place for all members and facilitators.**

- **Be on time**

Please plan to arrive no more than 10 minutes early to allow time to be checked in. Your facilitators spend time before the group preparing so please be respectful of this time. If you happen to arrive late, please quietly join the group. We will take a 5–10-minute break halfway through.

- **Group participants**

No one under the age of 18 is permitted to participate in the support group.

- **Maintain confidentiality**

Respecting each other's privacy and maintaining confidentiality is very important to us. We encourage you to share what you've learned about your own grief or coping strategies with others in your life, but **do not share identifying information or details about anyone else in group.** (See below for exceptions to confidentiality.)

- **Participation is encouraged but not forced**

We recognize that some may find it difficult to share. Everyone benefits from the group experience in their own way and sometimes people choose to observe and listen before they are ready to share. **You may "pass" at any time.**

- **Share time equally – silence is okay**



We share time equally and ask that you are mindful of how much time you are taking. It's the role of the facilitators to ensure everyone has an opportunity to share. If necessary, they will gently intervene to make sure this happens. Know that all feelings and emotions are valued. Tears are welcomed, so is laughter and silence.

- **Be respectful of differences**

Please be respectful and non-judgemental. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Please speak from your own experience and avoid giving advice unless someone asks for it. Discriminatory language, comments and unwelcome remarks or slurs about an individual or groups' background, culture, faith etc. will not be tolerated.

- **Listen, listen, listen**

It is the most precious gift we can give each other.

- **Peer support**

Peer support is described as a system of mutual emotional, social and practical support. It is a supportive relationship between people with a shared experience and is based on mutual respect, validation and hope. In the case of BFO-MR's support groups, a peer is someone who shares a lived experience with grief.

- **Facilitator's role**

The facilitators are peer volunteers, NOT therapists, counsellors or grief experts. They bring their own lived bereavement experience to group and use the skills obtained through BFO-MR's facilitator training program to create a safe space for you to share your grief experience with others. They will maintain the structure of the group by posing questions, pulling discussions back or redirecting, as well as gently intervening if any of the group guidelines aren't being met.

- **Confidentiality exceptions**

All of the volunteers at BFO-MR have signed a confidentiality agreement. However, it should be noted that **exceptions to the confidentiality rule are:**

**a)** If a person has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child, under the age of sixteen, is or may be at risk of physical, sexual or emotional harm or neglect, the person must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a Children's Aid Society. (Child and Family Services Act)

**b)** If a person suspects that a group member may be in danger of seriously harming themselves, or others, the person may seek advice or consultation that could result in breaching the confidentiality of a member. This could include: alerting the authorities and/or warning the person who is being threatened; and/or contacting a third party.





c) If called upon (subpoenaed) to testify in court.

