Collegial Support

Receiving support from your peers can be valuable in a number of ways. Being able to explore responses to challenging situations in a supportive environment can help you manage stress more effectively and build a sense of self-efficacy. Participating in peer support can help you to feel more confident in confronting work challenges.

People who participate in peer support interventions report better general health; increased participation in work activities; increased development opportunities; and a sense of feeling supported at work.¹

Suggestions for improving peer support:

Find a trusted and supportive colleague with whom you can talk through or brainstorm the following themes:²

- What is hardest about this work? What are the biggest challenges?
- What are the rewards of doing this work? What are the biggest benefits?
- How have I changed since I began this work? Consider both positive and negative changes.
- As I think of my work, what are my specific goals? How successful am I in achieving these goals?
- What is my sense of personal accomplishment in my work?
- What work barriers get in the way of my having more satisfaction and how can these barriers be addressed?
- What am I going to do to take care of myself?
- What do I need?
- What would I like to change?
- Have I talked to anyone about my feelings, and if so, what did the person say that I found helpful or unhelpful?
- Is there anything about my work experience that I have not told anyone?
- Is there anything about my work experience about which I say to myself, “I can’t handle that”?
- What are my social support options? How can I use social supports more effectively?
Start a peer support group to:

• Provide opportunities for discussion and reflection with colleagues, focusing on work-related stress and burnout.
• Provide opportunities for mutual support among colleagues, to share and compare experiences and to learn from one another.
• Discuss alternative ways to handle perceived stressful situations.

Support group members can share both challenges and successes confronted in the workplace. Consider having a facilitator who can manage interpersonal processes within the group.

The group could focus first on the question, **What do you believe causes stress and burnout?** Write down everything that comes to mind, considering organizational, societal, and individual perspectives. Pool the results of all group members, and choose themes for discussing potential solutions in coming sessions.

This method was used in a trial that showed favorable long-term effects on self-reported work demands, general health, perceived participation at work, and support at work. In that research, participants suggested the following themes:¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Factors</th>
<th>Workplace Factors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Demands on the individual, and solutions for meeting them</td>
<td>• Unreasonable demands or time pressure at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Drawing limits</td>
<td>• Psychosocial work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Balance home and work/work and home</td>
<td>• Communication at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• My stress signals/symptoms</td>
<td>• Conflicts at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Self-confidence</td>
<td>• Staff welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Powerlessness – inadequacy</td>
<td>• Positive factors at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What can I do to reduce my stress?</td>
<td>• Stressors at work and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-imposed high demands – try to please others</td>
<td>• Management does not listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What can improve my vitality?</td>
<td>• How can involvement at work be improved?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Difficulty in relaxing – why?</td>
<td>• How can I contribute to a positive social climate at work?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• My further development</td>
<td>• How to increase job satisfaction?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Emotions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Which strategies do I need for continuous growth?</td>
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</tbody>
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Suggest a work group to improve work relationships:

Civility, Respect, and Engagement at Work (CREW) - a work group model shown to improve burnout symptoms - uses the following steps:3

1) Introduce the need to improve working relationships to work group members and management, and discuss the formation of a work group to address these issues.
2) Have management encourage civility as a core value of the organization, with a signed commitment from a senior official to begin a work group process.
3) Distribute an initial survey to identify baseline organizational attitudes and behaviors. Identify facilitators who will receive summaries of the responses.
4) Create a learning community to develop and implement methods for improving working relationships.
5) Hold weekly workgroup meetings led by a facilitator to discuss challenges and solutions around specific topics (e.g., respect, attentiveness, accountability, cooperation, conflict resolution, professionalism, camaraderie, and leadership).
6) Create a community building process among all work participants, including conversations where facilitators share the identified challenges and solutions. Facilitators can lead exercises including practice in active listening; settling disputes; conflict resolution; and brainstorming suggestions for scenarios related to perceived disrespectful behavior. Activities can also occur between groups. For example, participants can agree to enact specific behaviors with coworkers during the upcoming week; keep logs of special contributions or acts of civility witnessed during the week; and give a weekly award for exceptional contributions to respectful behavior.
7) Include quarterly sustainability training and community building among participants.
References:


Suggested Reading List:


