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The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare introduced the peer student scheme for Finnish schools in 1972. The idea of having student peer supporters helping other students originated in the United States and at first focused on substance abuse education. The scheme has since expanded to cover a range of diverse practices. The key objectives of today’s peer support scheme are promotion of students’ participation, reduction of bullying and loneliness, as well as substance abuse education.

The work of the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare is based on the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stresses the importance of involving children and young people in public decision-making. A peer support scheme encourages young people to take responsibility and work independently. Peer supporters are ordinary students who volunteer to work for other young people and play an important part in developing a safe school ethos. The overall aim of the scheme is to ensure that no one is left alone or bullied and that everyone can feel s/he is a respected member of the community.

The Finnish peer support scheme has attracted interest from abroad and led to inquiries from our European partners. The purpose of this guide is to help schools and other organizations set up and device their own schemes. The guide has been compiled from a variety of sources originally published in Finnish by the League. It has been edited by Kirsi Pihlaja and Satu Tallgren, the League’s Youth Work Coordinators, and translated by Pirkko Leino and Timo Vilén.

It is our hope that this guide will inspire you to develop your own peer support schemes further and to encourage your students to contribute to their school and community. The activities presented in the guide have been tried and tested in several Finnish schools, and may not be directly applicable in other settings. However, we encourage the reader to adapt them to local context. We look forward to hearing about your experiences with peer support schemes.

Mannerheim League for Child Welfare

Mirjam Kalland, Secretary General
PART 1:
What is a peer support scheme?
What is a peer support scheme?

A peer support scheme is based on the idea of peer support. The students are all each other’s peers, as they are all about the same age, share the experience of being young and study in the same school.

In Finland, peer supporters are 8th- and 9th-graders in the upper grades of comprehensive school (aged 14–16 years) instructing 7th-graders aged 12–13 years. As many Finnish schools have been converted into comprehensive schools, the activities and processes involved in a peer support scheme not only address themselves to students in the upper grades, but also in the lower grades of comprehensive school (aged 6–12).

Conflicts, loneliness, exclusion and ostracising are everyday occurrences in school life. Peer support does not eliminate these problems but it helps prevent and combat them before they develop into a crisis.

Peer supporters are ordinary students who want to help others and contribute to the school community on a voluntary basis. They receive appropriate training, but there must always be an adult facilitator who retains responsibility for running the scheme and supervises them. The services of peer supporters include promoting group cohesion and positive group behaviour by running class discussions and organizing various games and activities that help students bond with each other and work together. Peer supporters also play an important part in preventing and combating bullying. They also arrange a range of various activities designed to promote a more supportive atmosphere in schools, while at the same learning in the activities and processes themselves.

The peer support scheme has established itself in Finland with a successful track record. The scope and range of peer support vary from school to school, reflecting the schools’ unique set of needs and circumstances. In addition, different actors involved in peer support systems are driven by their own motives. When designing and setting up a scheme, it is worth discussing the various needs and aims so the activities and processes related to the scheme will keep up the interest and drive of the participants.

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare has defined general aims for peer support scheme. The aims are based on Basic Education Act (1998, 2 §), according to which the purpose of the basic education “is to support pupils’ growth into humanity and into ethically responsible membership of society and to provide them with knowledge and skills needed in life.” The aims are made up of four main aims and several lower level aims.

Promotion of considerate behaviour in schools refers to various means of advancing cooperative and friendly atmosphere in schools. Peer supporters’ task is to undertake activities that encourage collaboration and turn-taking among students, and that highlight that every member of the school community should be valued and accepted for who s/he is. This contributes to students’ satisfaction with their school, and creates and atmosphere of trust and safety, which in turn promotes and helps learning.

Students who become peer supporters gain long-term social benefits such as increased self-esteem, and the development of interpersonal skills. The scheme aims at encouraging peer supporters as well as other students to explore their roles within the wider community. Peer supporters also help other students become aware of their responsibilities towards others and encourage them to contribute to their schools and the wider community. They help solving problems between disputing students, instil the values of tolerance into the school community and support a positive school ethos.

The aims of the scheme

The aims of peer support scheme vary from school to school, reflecting the schools’ unique set of needs and circumstances. In addition, different actors involved in peer support systems are driven by their own motives. When designing and setting up a scheme, it is worth discussing the various needs and aims so the activities and processes related to the scheme will keep up the interest and drive of the participants.

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Peer support programme also aims at promoting young people’s participation. The scheme is based on a belief that peer support can make a significant difference in schools. Compared to adults, peer supporters tend to have greater credibility and approachability among the students. When young people are trusted and valued as an important resource for the school community, they learn about democracy and to think for themselves.

In fact, peer support scheme provides a context through which other students in school can make their voice heard. In addition, the scheme encourages cooperation between adults and young people, thereby providing chances for everyone to engage for their community. For example, if the school’s ground rules are established jointly by adults and young people, the rules are more likely to be followed.

Peer support aims at proactively preventing and tackling problems in schools. Peer supporters are more able to identify problems associated with bullying etc. and can act as a bridge between the student body and the school staff. In addition, peer supporters set an example for other students in schools on when and how to discuss problems and refer distressed students to seek professional help.

Peer support aims to prevent bullying and reduce loneliness. The underlying message of the programme is that every student should feel safe and secure in school and that s/he should be totally accepted and respected in the school community regardless of his or her gender, race, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. Negative peer pressure involved in issues related to alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs is also worked through in peer-led discussions. Furthermore the assumption that experimentation with alcohol, cigarettes and drugs is an integral part of adolescence is called into question.

Peer support programme allows peer supporters and other students to learn and grow as individuals. Different exercises, theme days, and everyday activities provide opportunities to practice communication and social skills. Training sessions for peer supporters aim at equipping the participants with skills they can put into practice not only in their schools, but also in their everyday lives. The training of peer supporters is designed to increase their empathy and understanding towards others, and to encourage them to get to know themselves and to examine their roles as members of the larger school community.

Through peer support scheme, young people learn to act in a responsible manner and take on challenges. Peer support also provides a context within which other student can receive attention from peer supporters. In addition, peer support sets an example of how young people can engage and make their voice heard within the school community. The programme is about activating everybody, not just the students concerned.
Values guiding the practice of peer support

The core values underpinning the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare are as follows: appreciation of children and childhood, joint responsibility, humanity, tolerance, equality, and joy. The values of peer support scheme build on these values.

THE VALUES

Equality
Equality means that everyone is valued as an individual. Activities and processes involved in peer support scheme are designed to improve peer supporter’s ability to accept themselves as well as others as equal and unique individuals. By their own example, peer supporters also spread the idea of equality among the larger school community.

Voluntarism
Peer support scheme is founded on the principle of voluntarism. This is demonstrated by peer supporter’s willingness to take responsibility and to engage for the school community.

Joy
Working together is fun! Apart from peer supporters, all sections of the school community can take pleasure in activities and processes involved in peer support scheme.

Confidentiality
Peer supporters are obligated to maintain confidentiality. However, difficult issues can be confidentially discussed and worked through with other peer supporters, while peer supporters are also encouraged to turn to their supervisors or other reliable adults for advice and help.

Youth and appreciation of youth
Young people are experts in their own lives and have the right to have a voice in issues that directly affect them. Taking this as its starting point, peer support programme utilizes young people’s expertise in promoting and maintaining a positive school atmosphere.

Participation and empowerment of young people
Peer support programme provides a chance for young people to design, carry out, and assess activities related to the practice of peer support. It gives the young people confidence that they can make a difference and invites the larger school community to engage in constructive dialogue. In addition, peer supporters can act as a bridge between the student body and the staff and ensure that young people are listened to. Compared to their adult partners, peer supporters may be better placed to identify problems in their schools and can pass on information to school’s senior staff.
Core values, aims and resources of peer support scheme

**Aims**
- Promotion of considerate behaviour in schools
- Satisfaction with school
- Equality
- Participation and empowerment of young people
- Personal growth
- Learning
- Social skills
- Active citizenship
- Proactive prevention of problems
- Preventing and reducing bullying
- Prevention and reducing loneliness
- Peer-led substance abuse education
- Young people’s influence and democratic education
- Co-operative and friendly atmosphere
- Empathy
- Responsibility
- Empathy

**Values**
- Equality
- Joy
- Confidentiality
- Youth and appreciation
- Voicing

**Other resources**
- Training
- Financial support
- Time and material resources
- Full backing of all members of the school community
- Peer supporters
- Peer support trainer
- Headteacher
- School staff
- Other partners

**Resources**
- Full backing of all members of the school community
- Peer supporters
- Peer support trainer
- Headteacher
- School staff
- Other partners

**REASONS FOR SETTING UP A PEER SUPPORT SCHEME:**

1. It allows the students to have a greater say in the school → Promotion of democracy
2. It contributes to young people’s satisfaction with their school → More active participation in the community by the students
3. It promotes the healthy growth of the students → Increased well-being
4. Doing things together brings variety to the school’s daily routine → Opportunities for non-formal learning
5. It is FUN!
MLL’s support for peer support programmes

Peer support is the most important form of the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare’s involvement with young people and schools. As for today, approximately 90% of the upper grades (7-9) of comprehensive school in Finland have adopted peer support programmes.

The nationwide network of peer support includes over 800 staff co-ordinators (recruited mainly from the schools’ teaching staff), approximately 50 certified peer support trainers, and annually over 14,000 student peer supporters. Peer support programme is supported by the staff at the League’s central office and its 13 district organizations, as well as by hundreds of volunteers at League’s local associations.

The League’s central office is responsible for developing the peer support programme and for providing information and training for staff coordinators and peer support trainers. Apart from training, the central office also produces training materials and manuals designed for co-ordinators, peer support trainers and peer supporters.

Youth work co-ordinators at the League’s district organizations communicate with schools, and some districts even organize meetings for co-ordinators and peer supporters active in the region. In addition, district organizations communicate regularly with the people responsible for youth work at the League’s local associations.

Local associations provide practical support to schools in setting up and sustaining peer support. For example, this can involve contributing to the costs of training of peer supporters (trainer fees, venues, catering etc.) Local associations occasionally also assist in the training of peer supporters or provide them with t-shirts, badges, or hooded jackets (imprinted with peer support scheme’s logo) to improve their visibility. In addition, local associations sometimes offer grants for peer supporters.
PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR PEER STUDENT PROGRAMMES

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare has developed a set of principles of good practice to act as a basis for assessing and developing peer support in schools.

Activities and processes involved in a peer support programme
- demonstrate the fundamental values of the League’s peer student scheme
- demonstrate the aims set by the League
- are based on co-operation with the League’s district and local organizations and other local actors

School staff and school management
- staff co-ordinators are compensated for their work
- the school allows adequate time and material resources as well as adequate venues for activities related to peer support
- peer support is written into school curriculum
- peer support is written into school strategy
- the division of labour and tasks between peer supporters and student council is clear and known to everybody involved
- the students and the school staff both know who their peer supporters are
- peer support scheme has a full backing of the senior staff and the head teacher
- the staff, students, and their parents / carers are kept informed about the school’s peer support scheme

Staff co-ordinators
- take part in training, meetings, and seminars organized by the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare
- take advantage of manuals and other materials produced by the League
- join the League’s mailing list to receive training material and topical information
- take responsibility for selecting and supervising peer supporters
- provide guidance and supervision to peer supporters on a regular basis
- set up the aims for school’s peer support activities alongside with the peer supporters
- act as intermediary between peer supporters and staff
- provide feedback and keeps up the momentum for peer students

Student peer supporters
- receive appropriate training in issues central to the practice of peer support
- receive refresher or updating training as the programme unfolds
- take advantage of manuals and other materials produced by the League
- organize morning assemblies and deliver presentations for their “buddy classes”
- guide new students into the school environment and help them bond with their classmates
- organize activities that promote positive and supportive school ethos
- are involved in proclamation and promotion of School Peace during the school year
- combat bullying and facilitate social inclusion
Peer support and participation

Peer groups play a fundamental role in the lives and personal development of children and young people. However, adults do not always fully understand how important peer relationships are for young people. Being accepted by one’s peers is essential, and young people often define social exclusion as isolation from their classmates.

Research has shown that peer-led approaches are an effective way of engaging young people and children. Young people feel more comfortable discussing sensitive issues with their peers than with adults, and are in general more likely to seek help from other young people rather than from parental figures. In addition, young people are keen to learn from their peers, and often question the authoritarian approaches used by adults. In short, peers are better able to relate to their peers because of their age and common experiences — and that is why peer supporters have a very special role to play within the school community.

In spite of this, many adults still think that young people have little to contribute. There is, to be sure, a widespread agreement that children and young people should be included in the decision-making process at levels appropriate to their capacities. Nevertheless, when it comes to e.g. school activities, the adults are used to planning them without consulting the students.

Adults are responsible for ensuring that young people are being involved through representation and participation. Genuine participation is democracy, and the best way to teach democracy to students is to incorporate the principles of democracy into the school practices. Participation by young people should not only be encouraged, but actively sought out and welcomed as a valuable input. And more than that, young people should not be treated as objects, but rather as significant partners whose participation benefits and enriches the whole community. Learning young people to take responsibility for themselves, other people in their community, and the environment requires an atmosphere of trust and mutual appreciation. This often calls for a change in the way we think about young people: Do we trust them? Do we listen to them? Do we recognize their needs and do we show that we appreciate them and what they do?

In this guide participation is understood as young people having a voice and impact on decisions that directly affect them. It means young people setting their own goals, making decisions, and learning to take responsibility for their decisions.

Enabling young peoples’ participation does not mean:
- straightforward transfer of power from adults to young people;
- adults giving up their share of responsibility;
- prioritising young people’s views over everyone else’s;
- leaving young people without guidance or support from adults.

Participation does mean:
- helping students behave in a responsible and co-operative manner;
- respecting different views and practices and allowing discussion;
- listening to young people’s ideas and, when feasible, implementing them;
- learning and doing things together.
The role of staff co-ordinator

Peer support requires an adult co-ordinator. Often they are staff members, but a school nurse or a local youth worker can also take responsibility for running the scheme. Larger schools often have more than one co-ordinator, and some schools also have a specific steering team with representatives from the staff and peer supporters.

Although the scheme depends heavily on co-ordinator’s enthusiasm and commitment, the school must allow adequate resources for peer support to succeed. Co-ordinators must have enough non-contact time for administration and supervising the peer supporters, coupled with financial resources to cover e.g. materials and peer supporters’ training. Ideally co-ordinators should also be trained in participatory methods and group dynamics, especially if s/he is not familiar with these approaches.

Co-ordinator’s role is to facilitate peer supporters’ potential and to help them come up with their own ideas, rather than control them. However, it is the adult supervisor who takes the responsibility for running the scheme and decides on its aims together with the peer supporters. The co-ordinator also ensures that activities and processes involved in the scheme are adequately assessed and evaluated, and keeps up the enthusiasm for the participants.

Co-ordinator’s personality plays a major part in contributing to the success of the scheme. Many co-ordinators have told that their work has helped them see their student through new lenses and from an entirely different perspective. In addition, involvement in a peer support scheme provides an opportunity for co-ordinators to develop their instruction to better meet the needs of individual students. The relationship between a co-ordinator and peer supporters is somewhat different to a normal teacher-student relationship. For young people, the co-ordinator represents a reliable adult they can turn to for help and advice; an adult who is interested in their personal growth, gives positive feedback, and does not assess their progress numerically.

To avoid misunderstandings, the co-ordinator will need to ensure that other members of the staff are kept informed of peer supporters’ meetings and other engagements. Another factor that contributes to the scheme’s success and sustainability is that co-ordinators are not replaced every year. This is something that must be kept in mind when introducing the scheme. In fact, some Finnish schools have co-ordinators who have been active for more than twenty years and still find their work important and stimulating.

Working together prevents exclusion
Participation can only take place when adults are sensitive to what young people say and what they need. A co-ordinator must be patient enough to allow young people to come up with own ideas and define, plan and carry out activities – though it can sometimes be difficult not to push through one’s own ideas.

Watching young people grow and develop is a wonderful experience. The best thing about processes that involve young people is the genuine joy they get out of them. These activities can be enormously important for them, as they can involve new friends and a boost for their confidence. Working together prevents exclusion and can give a new direction for young people’s life.

Young people have lots of new ideas and lots of energy. They must have proper facilities and other resources to put their projects into action. Involving young people requires the support of our partners and sponsors and an adult who bears responsibility for facilitating their activities.

Tuula Lahti, teacher, peer support co-ordinator
Peer supporters can make a difference

Peer supporters are volunteers who are willing to engage for other people and their community in a positive and constructive manner. Although peer supporters are not expected to demonstrate an impressive school record, they do need to have a positive attitude towards school and learning and an understanding of the school’s culture. In a way, peer supporters can be viewed as sorts of receivers picking up weak and strong signals from the school community. Peer supporters simply take an interest in what is happening in their school. They act on the signals they receive and deal with a wide range of problems before they develop into a crisis.

By promoting diversity and equality, peer supporters set an example to the entire school community. Involvement in a peer support programme allows students to become aware of their own prejudices, while at the same time helping them respect people with different cultures, beliefs, traditions, and languages. Although peer supporters do not have to be everyone’s best friends, they do have many of the qualities of a good friend such as honesty and reliability. They are easily accessible, willing to listen to other students’ concerns and, when a referral should be made, know where to seek more formal and professional help.

Maintaining confidentiality is essential for the practice of peer support and its appreciation. However, respecting confidentiality does not mean that confidential information may under any circumstances be disclosed: it means that confidential issues should never be told or repeated to anyone outside the peer supporters’ group. In addition, peer supporters should be taught that with serious disclosures they are bound to refer the matter on to the co-ordinator or other senior member of the staff.

While various activities, such as theme days and celebrations, play an important part in promoting a positive and supportive school ethos, they should not be the main focus of the service: rather than on special occasions, peer support manifests itself in the everyday workings of the school.

Peer supporters sometimes become over-enthusiastic and need to be reminded that they are not responsible for eradicating all the problems in their schools. As peer supporters often become friends with each other, there is also the risk that they begin to resemble an exclusive club. Should this happen, the co-ordinator must be prepared to step in and bring the group back to its task. In some cases, peer supporters can make themselves guilty of bullying or ostracising. Clearly, a student who bullies others cannot be a peer supporter.

**International Week**

As peer students, we were involved in designing an International Week for our school. The idea was to introduce the students to internationality issues. Each day of the week focused on a different country, with a team of peer supporters planning the content of the day. My team worked on Switzerland.

In the morning of the Switzerland Day, we gave a short lecture on the rights of young people in Switzerland over the school’s PA system. We also had a quiz with a few easy questions on the country, its currency and languages, etc. At the end of the day, we held a lottery to determine which of the students would be given the prize, Swiss chocolate and cheese.

Iida Vesterinen, peer supporter, aged 16
Keuruu Comprehensive School

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**THE MOST IMPORTANT DUTIES OF A PEER SUPPORTER**

- Helping student bond with each other
- Caring about other students
- Being a “buddy”
- Being him or herself
PART 2:

Setting up peer support schemes
Setting up peer support schemes

In many Finnish schools, the reasons for adopting peer support relate to bullying and efforts to reduce it by promoting a more caring school ethos. Other reasons include providing students a forum to express their views and simply vitalizing the school’s everyday life. The initiative for setting up a scheme may come from the students, the staff, or the parents/carers.

Before designing and setting up the programme, the aims of the programme and commitment of all sections of the school community need to be discussed. Are there other activities in place that could be integrated into the programme or that could offer mutual support? Is there an active student council in the school? How could peer supporters and representatives of the student council work together and what are the boundaries of their roles?

When introducing a peer support scheme, it is important to engage the whole school in planning and deciding on the project. The aims of the scheme must have a full backing of all sections of the school community, and while the decision to initiate a scheme is taken by the head teacher, the whole school community should be taken on board at an early stage of the process. Particularly, it is essential that everyone understands that the whole school stands to gain from the scheme, not just the providers of the service.

Appointing a co-ordinator is the next step in preparing for the project. Co-ordinators – it helps if they are two – are usually recruited from the school’s teaching staff, and they need to be committed and genuinely interested in the scheme.

Setting up the scheme involves a number of time consuming steps, so the recruitment and training of peer supporters is best planned a term in advance. Suitable facilities, time, and other resources also need to be secured. In some Finnish schools, activities involved in a peer support programme take place within the curriculum time, while others require that they take place as extra curriculum activities. In most schools peer supporters carry out their duties during breaks and extra curriculum time, but are excused from lessons if necessary. However, there should be an understanding among the staff that missing lessons must not add to peer supporters’ workload as the programme itself provides an excellent opportunity to learn and develop a wide range of valuable skills and competences.
QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN SETTING UP A PEER SUPPORT SCHEME

1. What is peer support?
   – School staff and head teachers familiarize themselves with peer support
   – It is important to ensure that the entire staff is consulted and aware of why the school wants to introduce a scheme.

2. How does peer support relate to existing welfare services in the school?
   – Discussing how peer support will fit the activities and processes already in place in the school.

3. What are the aims of the scheme?
   – Setting aims for the school’s peer support.

4. How will the scheme be embedded in the everyday workings of the school?
   – Deciding on whether training sessions and regular meetings for peer supporters will be run on different school days over a period of time, as an optional course in curriculum time, or as an extra curriculum activity. Deciding on extra salary for the co-ordinator.

5. Who will supervise and support peer supporters?
   – Appointing co-ordinator/s.

6. How will the co-ordinators be trained into their tasks and duties?
   – The co-ordinators are trained in interactive training techniques. As for Finland, the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare produces various training guides and organizes training courses to the co-ordinators.

7. Which students will be appointed as peer supporters?
   – Deciding on how peer supporters will be selected. The majority of schools use formal selection with application forms and interviews.
   – Selecting peer supporters

8. How will peer supporters be prepared for their roles?
   – Peer supporters receive appropriate training. This guide provides a framework for training courses for peer supporters. Apart from staff co-ordinators, the students can be trained by e.g. local community and youth workers who are qualified in interactive and participative training techniques. In Finland, the League’s district organizations offer qualified trainers.

9. Which activities and processes will be involved in the scheme?
   – Peer supporters and co-ordinator draw up a plan of action.

10. How will the scheme be advertised and publicized?
    – School staff, students and parents/carers are informed of the launching of the scheme.

11. What worked well and what did not during the first year?
    – Peer supporters, co-ordinator and school government evaluate activities and processes involved in the scheme.

12. What do we do next?
    – Planning the next year’s programme
Recruiting peer supporters

Students who volunteer for peer supporters are motivated by a variety of reasons. The reasons can include: helping other people, finding new friends and working with the old ones, or organizing and getting involved in exciting activities. The activities involved in a peer support programme provide opportunities for learning and prepare peer supporters for new challenges. Involvement in peer support programmes has encouraged a number of students to take up a career in social services or nursing. However, the main thing is that students who apply for peer supporters demonstrate motivation and enthusiasm for this type of voluntary work.

Recruiting new peer supporters is a crucial stage of the system. Important criteria for a peer supporter are commitment to the aims of the scheme, an ability to be oneself, an ability to empathize with other people and to accept diversity, an active personality and a positive approach to school life, coupled with realistic expectations the scheme. Different personalities, whether introvert or extrovert, enrich the group’s perspective. Ideally, the group should involve both girls and boys.

Provided that the school already has some history of peer support, the group can include...

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Annual schedule for peer support: an example

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May</th>
<th>August</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Training sessions for peer supporters</td>
<td>– Inducting new students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Meeting with the new intake of students</td>
<td>– Guiding new student into the school environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Making plans for the next term</td>
<td>– Deciding on meetings (weekly, bi-weekly?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Graduation party for school leavers</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April</th>
<th>September</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Organizing an activity for grade 7 students</td>
<td>– Guiding and supporting new students</td>
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<tr>
<th>March</th>
<th>October</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Theme week around substance abuse education</td>
<td>– Class discussions and presentations on community spirit and combating bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Training of the new intake of peer supporters</td>
<td>– Theme week on diversity; a fancy dress party around Halloween</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>February</th>
<th>November</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Valentine’s Day party</td>
<td>– Organizing various activities at breaks (around a specific theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Universal Children’s Day on 20 November</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– The school’s Christmas party</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>December</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>– Selecting new peer supporters</td>
<td>– Peer supporters’ own Christmas party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Class discussions and presentations on equality and diversity</td>
<td>– Peer supporters’ Christmas broadcast over the school’s PA system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Evaluation of the autumn term</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
one or two at-risk students. Getting involved in a peer support scheme can help students who are running the risk of social exclusion by providing an opportunity to connect with other students and to find new interests. However, including such students requires adequate resources as well as support and commitment from the rest of the group.

How the selection is done and who is selected is crucial and will affect the general appreciation of the peer support activities. To ensure the success of the scheme, the process should be carried out carefully and with special attention to the larger school community. All approaches have their advantages and disadvantages, and finding the right one may take a lot of time and require creative thinking.

In some schools peer supporters are selected by the staff. A disadvantage with this type of selection is that the staff does not always know the applicants well enough to be able to judge whether they enjoy credibility with other students. On the other hand, the students selected by the teachers tend to be actively engaged in the school life and are familiar with the school culture. Peer supporters can also be nominated by the students to ensure credibility with their peers. However, an apparent disadvantage with this approach is that less popular but otherwise suitable students are not likely to be elected.

Inherent in the values of peer support is that the process should be accessible to all students. To ensure fair and equal access the candidates can be asked to fill in an application form or to write an informal motivation letter outlining why they are applying and what they feel they can contribute to scheme. Some schools even take advantage of the current peer supporters when recruiting and interviewing the candidates. The co-ordinator can also consult the staff about the suitability of the applicants.

The size of the school, the type of service, and the enthusiasm shown by the candidates determine the number of peer supporters selected for training. In some years there may be plenty of candidates to choose from; in others all applicants can be selected. The number of peer supporters needed also depends on time and financial resources allowed for the project, as well as the fact that many of the activities and techniques used in the training do not easily lend themselves to groups larger than 20 participants. In large schools, however, peer supporters can be divided into two groups, each with their own adult co-ordinator.

The selection and training of the new cohort of peer supporters usually takes place in the spring so they will be available and ready for action when the new intake of students start their school. Most school also have older peer supporters inducting the new cohort of peer supporters into their new roles and duties.

Peer supporters in action

Although the framework presented in this guide can be used in setting up a peer support scheme, the scheme needs to be tailored to a school’s unique needs. What works for one school may be completely inappropriate for another. The next section briefly outlines some of the most common approaches in use in Finland.

Peer support in the school setting has mushroomed into many diverse approaches, all based on the idea of young people helping and guiding other young people. One of the most important duties of a peer supporter is to be involved in the induction of new students. Peer supporters can be divided into groups of two or three, with each group attached to a new intake group to guide the new students into their new environment. A proper induction for children about to start their new school benefits the whole school community: the sooner the new students start feeling comfortable in their new environment, the sooner they will be able to wholeheartedly concentrate on their studies. Apart from new students, peer supporters can also act as guides for visitors to the school (other students, parents, or other groups). In addition, they can attend open days and parent-teacher meetings to represent students’ views and concerns to adults, and visit students in the lower grades of comprehensive school to tell about their school.

Peer supporters also organize theme days around issues such as bullying and internationality, as well as celebratory activities on special occasions. For example, many Finnish schools have an established tradition of peer supporters organizing a Valentine’s Day’s party with students making Valentine cards for each other etc.
In Finland Valentine’s Day is known as “Ystävänpäivä” which translates into “Friend’s day”. As the name suggests, the day is more about celebrating friends and friendship, rather than love and affection between intimate companions. This is also why peer supporters have found Valentine’s Day such an excellent occasion to celebrate their services. Other theme days and school festivals include Christmas parties and celebration of the Universal Children’s Day.

Breaks provide opportunities for peer supporters to organize different games and activities that promote school’s spirit. They can also set up a drop-in service or be available in a specified room particularly during the first weeks of the autumn term so the new students will know where to find them.

**FIRST MEETING WITH NEW STUDENTS: AN EXAMPLE**

- Welcome to our school!
- Tell the new students what makes this school special.
- Introduction. Introduce yourself by telling your name, personal interests, and what form you are in.
- Introduction to the peer support scheme. Explain the aims of the activities and processes involved in the programme. Also tell the student why you volunteered for peer supporters and how and when they can find you (location of the service, contact information on the school’s notice boards etc.)
- Introduction to the school. Explain the school rules and show the school facilities. Also tell the students where to find school nurse, student counsellor, school welfare officer, and other members of the staff. Explain how to read the timetable, and where to find the toilets.
- Games and activities to promote social cohesion and to help the students bond with each others. Use games that both you and the new students will like.

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**Welcome to our school**

Our school had a welcome party for the new students. In the gym where we had set up a circuit of different activities. The party was organized by peer supporters, while teachers remained in the background.

It was fun to think of games we had liked ourselves and that the new students might like too. Planning the event further added to our team spirit. Each part of the circuit was manned by two peer supporters. My pair and I worked well together as we were well prepared and had planned everything in advance.

I enjoyed organizing the event very much because I felt it would be a good way to help 7th-graders bond with each other. It also gave me more experience in taking responsibility and engaging in a social activity.

All planning is likely to involve some mistakes, but this time they were small and harmless, and nothing that couldn’t be fixed with a little improvisation.

_Ulla Siltanen, peer supporter, aged 16_  
_Keuruu Comprehensive School_
PART 3:
Training models
Basic training

Training courses for peer supporters provide an introduction to various activities involved in the programme. The scope of the course varies and depends on the school’s requirements. The training can take place as an optional course in curriculum time, or on different school days over a period of time. Although many schools opt to run courses during in curriculum time, the training can also take place at weekends and in a non-school environment. A weekend course, for example, has long been a popular model in Finland. Organizing the course in a non-school environment promotes a new kind of interaction and allows participants to explore their roles and take on new ones. Creating a relaxed and informal atmosphere for the training is essential. To ensure maximal interaction the participants should sit on the floor or in a semi-circle. In addition, to mix people up they should swap pairs and groups on a regular basis.

The framework presented below contains a brief description of the purpose of each activity, the materials needed and the estimated length of the activity. The framework has been designed for a group of about 15 students, and some activities that. Some of the activities may take more or less time than indicated depending on the number of participants, and the trainer should ensure that the time set for the activities is appropriate for the size of the group to allow discussion. The course must also involve informal breaks to ensure that participant can share and reflect on their ideas, as well as bond with each other.

The basic training course includes three main themes. While all individual themes should be covered, the precise content of the course can be modified to ensure the training meets the needs of the group. Course content and style also depend on co-ordinator’s experience and his or her personal style. A precondition to successful training is careful planning and a clear structure; simply browsing through this guide will not be enough for learning the model and using it appropriately.

The course should be made interactive and consist of short activities interspersed with games to give participants energy and to help them relax. Depending on the course aims and level of skills the participants have, activities from follow-up courses can also be used.

### COURSE CONTENT OF THE BASIC TRAINING

The aim of the course is to equip participants with skills they need in their peer supporter roles.

Another aim of the course is team building and improving their interpersonal skills.

**Introduction to peer support (3 hours)**
- Introductions
- Self-awareness
- The duties of a peer supporter
- The nature of peer support

**Interpersonal skills (4.5 hours)**
- Practising and teaching of interpersonal skills
- Working as a team
- Challenges associated with peer support

**Different forms of peer support (4.5 hours)**
- Setting aims and planning the future activities
- Deciding on preferred approaches
- Evaluation
Introduction to peer support (3 hours)

At the beginning of the course, participants are introduced to each other and start to form a group identity. The participants reflect on the nature of peer support and their own peer support roles. They will also be given basic information on the principles of the peer student scheme.

Turquoise Tina and Green Gary

▶ Aim: To get to know the names of the group members.
▶ Length: 15 minutes.

Instructions: Participants introduce themselves by telling their name and a colour that begins with the initial letter of their name. To make it easier to learn the names, they repeat the previous participants’ names before saying their own, e.g.: ‘This is Green Gary and I am Turquoise Tina.’

It’s in the cards

▶ Aim: To introduce group members to each other and to the scheme.
▶ Length: 30 minutes.
▶ Materials: A set of different picture postcards.

Instructions: The trainer lays out the cards or items so that everyone can see them. Each participant has a look at the cards and picks out two of them. (Some of the students may end up choosing the same cards.) One of the cards represents something about the participants’ personal life (their families, leisure interests or pets, for example), while the other one represents their hopes and expectations in relation to the course. Once everyone has chosen their cards, they tell the others about them. Instead of picture postcards, the trainer can also use cards with different adjectives written on them or bring a selection of small items.

Learning and discovering

▶ Aim: To understand the goals of the course and to get an overall picture of the course content.
▶ Length: 25 minutes.

Instructions: Participants are divided into teams randomly, e.g. according to their height. First, time the participants ten minutes and ask them to quickly think what they understand to be the goals of the course on the basis of the following questions:
- Why do peer supporters need training?
- What kinds of things should they learn?
- What can I do to promote learning within the group?

Afterwards discuss the answers together. The trainer then presents the aims and content of the course, while contrasting them with the hopes and expectations discussed during the previous activity. This is also a good time to establish a set of ground rules for the course.

Personal ads

▶ Aim: To strengthen the students’ self-awareness and to identify the qualities of a good peer supporter.
▶ Length: 20 minutes.
▶ Materials: Pencils and paper.

Instructions: Many newspapers and magazines publish personal ads sent in by people looking for a friend. Personal ads usually include a short description of the sender as well as his or her personal qualities, skills and interests. In this exercise, participants are asked to write a personal ad in order to find a friend among younger students. The ads should contain 5-7 lines describing what they like about themselves and in what ways they are prepared to contribute to the friendship. The trainer then collects the ads and reads them aloud, while the students try to guess who wrote which ad. After the session discuss the qualities of a friend and a peer supporter.
Sunflower

**Aim:** To identify personal strengths and areas needing support and development and to practise giving and receiving positive feedback.

**Length:** 20 minutes.

**Materials:** Pencils and paper.

Instructions: Participants are asked to draw a large sunflower with their own name in the centre of it and with some petals and leaves on the stem of the flower. The participants then fill in the petals with what they consider to be their personal strengths—a positive personal quality or a special skill—and the leaves with areas they think would need support and development. Note that the petals should outnumber the leaves. Once everyone has completed their sunflowers, the drawings are hung on the wall and everyone can add more petals and positive qualities on each other’s sunflowers. If the students do not know each other well, the trainer encourages them to write something positive based on their first impressions of each other.

Cloud map

**Aim:** To think about the role and tasks of peer supporters.

**Length:** 30 minutes.

**Materials:** Pencils and large sheets of paper.

Instructions: The students are divided into groups in alphabetical order (surnames). The groups are then asked to draw a balloon in the middle of a blank sheet of paper. The balloon represents peer supporters and has the text: ‘A good peer supporter’ attached to it. The balloon is floating across the sky surrounded by three kinds of summer clouds. Some clouds symbolize things that are important in participants’ lives; others stand for things that they can draw strength from. The third set of clouds represent peer supporters’ future hopes and dreams.

The cloud maps are then presented to other groups. Do the maps drawn by the other groups contain similar things and ideas? How do the personal strengths identified in the previous exercise relate to the practice of peer support? Which of the strengths will benefit peer supporters? How can involvement in a peer support scheme help them develop as an individual?

On the basis of the cloud maps and the discussion, the groups then establish the aims and objectives of a peer support scheme. What kind of activities would they like to undertake? What are the aims of the scheme in their school? What does the school need? Different ways of achieving these goals will be further discussed in an exercise called “acting together”.

P-E-E-R S-U-P-P-O-R-T-E-R

**Aim:** To gain a better understanding of participants’ perception of peer support and to explore their motives.

**Length:** 25 minutes.

**Materials:** Pens and paper.

Instructions: The participants are asked to write a poem around the theme “peer supporter”. The first line of the poem should begin with ‘P’ (the initial letter of “peer supporter”), the second one with ‘E’ and so on. The groups then discuss their understanding of the word ‘peer supporter’ with the help of the following questions:

- What kind of values do peer supporters represent? What do they not represent?
- How do the peer supporters show that they can be relied on? How is trust built up, maintained and developed?
- What is required from a peer supporter?
- Peer supporters are expected to set an example of tolerance, but how should this be done in practice?
- How will the peer supporters be able to live up to their role? What kind of support do they need?

The group then reconvenes to discuss their responses together. It is essential that the trainer clarifies potential misunderstandings so the students will not start feeling overwhelmed by the many expectations and responsibilities placed on them. The participants should also be made to understand that they are not expected to take on the role of a school psychologists or a social worker, but rather to help other students seek help for their concerns and problems from adults in the school.

EXPANDING THE COURSE CONTENT

- Additional warm-up exercises to introduce participants to the group.
- Trust games and activities to learn about the importance of group work and to build group cohesion.
- Discussion about how one’s self-image and self-esteem are constructed and how our self-awareness can be improved.
Interpersonal skills
(4.5 hours)

The focus of this section is on interaction and social skills. In addition, the participants will learn about the principles of teamwork, while also identifying the challenges associated with peer support.

Johari Window

- **Aim:** To increase participants’ self-awareness.
- **Length:** 20 minutes.

**Instructions:** The trainer presents the Johari Window, a tool used for improving self-awareness and understanding the reasons why people behave the way they do.

### JOHARI WINDOW

1) **Open quadrant**
The open quadrant is the area we and other people know – the area we want other people to know and one that they do know. It describes our own way of thinking, acting and dealing with different issues. The larger the area, the easier we can express ourselves and the easier we communicate with each other. The area of this quadrant varies in different situations: we are more open among our friends than in the company of strangers.

2) **Blind quadrant**
The blind quadrant refers to those areas of our actions, emotions and attitudes that we do not or will not notice but which other people will see. Some may find our behaviour jealous or inconsiderate without us realizing it ourselves. If we are given constructive feedback, we can get to know ourselves better and gain a new perspective on how we affect other people. Constructive feedback will reduce our blind quadrant and consequently make the open quadrant bigger.

3) **Hidden quadrant**
The hidden quadrant contains things we do not wish to tell anyone. In general, we are afraid of showing any feelings that we consider negative, such as fear, anger, grief or anxiety. However, concealing lots of ideas, thoughts and emotions will undermine our strength and make our behaviour insincere. Everyone is allowed to secrets, but the aim should be to reduce the hidden area and increase the open area by disclosing relevant information and feelings.

4) **Unknown quadrant**
The unknown quadrant contains the part of ourselves that neither we nor others are aware of. There are times when we find it difficult to understand ourselves and our behaviour. Self-awareness exercises and new situations will help us learn more about ourselves and understand those areas in ourselves that we are not aware of.

Positive human relationships make our open quadrant to expand and the blind and hidden quadrants to reduce. Self-awareness and self-confidence make it easier for us to express our thoughts and feelings and to cooperate better, as we find it easier to be ourselves in different situations.

Based on the Johari Window, the participants are asked to discuss how they can help other students improve their self-awareness. What does it mean when we say that peer support promotes the students’ healthy growth? What should the school community be like to allow everyone to develop? What bearing does the Johari Window have on a happy school community?
Expressing myself

➤ **Aim:** To become aware of participants’ social skills and to offer them the experience of guiding others.

➤ **Length:** 95 minutes (20-minutes preparation and five 15-minute teaching sessions)

**Instructions:** The participants arrange themselves in a line according to their date of birth. When arranging themselves, they are allowed to use gestures and sign language, but not to talk. The trainer then splits the students into five groups and instructs every group to prepare a short teaching session of about 15 minutes for the larger group, involving both theory and short activities. After each group has presented their session, the participants are asked to reflect on their experiences. What was it like to instruct the others? What was difficult? What worked well and less well? Was there enough time to prepare for the session?

**Team A: SOFTEN**
The acronym SOFTEN reminds us of the importance of positive non-verbal communication:

- **Smile** Positive facial expressions
- **Open** Open posture, open mind
- **Forward** Leaning forward
- **Touch** Friendly touch
- **Eye contact** Making and maintaining eye contact
- **Nod** Showing that you are listening

Positive nonverbal communication is an effecting way of communicating with other people. Discuss the various types of non-verbal communication and the reasons why peer supporters should be aware of their body language.

Plan and prepare a teaching session of about 15 minutes in duration on how to soften our non-verbal communication. The session should also involve an activity that allows the participants to practice their interpersonal skills.

**Team B: Listening**
The art of listening is among peer supporters’ greatest assets. What kinds of people are easy to listen to? When is it easy to listen to other people? What can make listening easy or difficult? When have you been ignored and not listened to?

Plan and prepare a teaching session of about 15 minutes in duration on listening skills. The session should also involve an activity (e.g. a role playing game) that allows the participants to experience how it feels not to be listened to.

**Team C: Observing**
An ability to observe and intervene are important for a peer supporter. Why? What do we mean when we say that a peer supporter “picks up signals from the school community? In what ways does a peer supporter observe his surroundings?

Plan and prepare a teaching session of about 15 minutes in duration on observing. The session should also involve an exercise that introduces the participants to situations that require intervention by a peer supporter.

**Team D: Equality, respect, and diversity**
It is easy to call oneself tolerant, but what does tolerance mean? Who is different to others? What is a “normal” person like – and is there such a person? Who decides what is different and what is normal? What is the difference between tolerance and respect? Peer supporters are expected to show respect to others, but how should this be done?

Plan and prepare a teaching session of about 15 minutes in duration on tolerance and accepting diversity. Bullying often stems from disrespect. Ask the participants to discuss bullying, the various forms it takes and the ways it can be combated. What can peer supporters do to combat and reduce bullying?

**Team E: Assertiveness**
Assertiveness means standing up for your rights. It also means an ability to turn down an unreasonable requests and undesired offers, as well as a readiness to seek help. We have to be able to express ourselves even if it means disagreeing with other people. When have you been forced to defend your views? Why is assertiveness important for a peer supporter?

What exactly is assertiveness: arguing aggressively or well-founded opinions?

Plan and prepare a teaching session of about 15 minutes in duration focusing on improving assertiveness. The session can include activities that allow the participants to practice communicating assertively.
Four corners

► **Aim:** To learn to validate one’s views and discussing tolerance.
► **Length:** 25 minutes.
► **Materials:** Four sheets of paper, each bearing one of the following statements: Totally agree, Mostly agree, Mostly disagree, Totally disagree. Each sheet is placed in a different corner of the room.

**Instructions:** The instructor reads out one of the statements in the list below. The participants are asked to choose and move to a corner that matches their opinions. The whole group then discusses the statement, after which the instructor moves on to the next statement, and so on. As a follow-up to this exercise, the trainer can ask the participants to prepare a speech and to articulate their views.

**Statements:**
- We cannot do without television, computers, and mobile phones.
- Language skills are the key to success.
- We do not need more immigrants in our country.
- There is nothing wrong with throwing rubbish on the ground – someone else will pick it up anyway.
- Old people are a pain in the neck.
- Young people are more tolerant than adults.
- Racism is stupid.
- Summer is the best season of all.
- I would rather live in some other city.
- I am in control of my future.

Our team

► **Aim:** To learn about the different levels of teamwork and the principles of working as a team.
► **Length:** 85 minutes.
► **Materials:** Pencils and paper

**Instructions:** Get the participants in a line and divide them into groups on the basis of their hair colour. The activity consists of three stages.

**Step 1: Basic values (15 minutes)**
The atmosphere of a group is greatly influenced by the values of the individual group members. At this first stage, the participants are asked to write down ten most important values in their lives. Before starting, the trainer can explain what is meant by values and provide some examples. After the participants have finished their lists, they are asked to narrow the list down to three most important values, and then to the single most important value. The most important values of the individual participants are then combined into a list. The school’s head teacher can also be asked to take part in the activity by presenting the values of the school.

**Step 2: Logo and motto (30 minutes)**
The trainer asks participants to design a logo and a motto for the peer supporters’ group. A logo is a graphic emblem or mark representing the group, while a motto is a phrase summarizing what the group thinks is important for their service. Together, the logo and the motto will build the mission statement of the group. If desired, the results can be displayed to the entire school. The students can also vote for the best logo and motto.

**Step 3: A TV star’s relationship network (30 minutes)**
The trainer describes the situation to the participants and hands out to each participant a list containing the roles.

The participants are asked to imagine the following situation: You have landed your dream job as a trainee in a popular television show. You have appeared briefly in a couple of episodes, but owing to positive response from the viewers, you have now been promoted to one of the leading characters in the show. In the show you are playing a host for a popular music show for teenagers. As the series unfolds, new characters of your age will be introduced to the show. They play important parts in your life and you are allowed to decide who will be appointed to these additional roles. For each role, write down the name of the peer supporter you would like to see in that role, while describing the positive qualifications that make him or her a good choice for the role. For example: ‘My brother should be played by Matthew, because he is funny and fair. It would also be nice to do something together since he is great at teaching his skills to others.’

**The roles:** your trusted friend, your father, your boss, your sister, your neighbour, your bodyguard, your mother, your secretary, your personal trainer, your brother, your colleague, your stylist, your manager.

Depending on the size of the group, more roles can be introduced or some of the suggested left out. After the participants have made their choices, they are asked to present and justify their choices. This provides an opportunity for each participant to learn how others see them. Sum up with a discussion on what each participant has learned from the exercise.
SWOT analysis

- **Aim:** To identify challenges associated with peer support.
- **Length:** 45 minutes.
- **Materials:** Pencils and paper.

**Instructions:** Divide the participants into groups on the basis of colour of their shirts – red tones form one group, blue tones another, and so on. The participants are then asked to carry out a SWOT analysis to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in the project. Before starting it is worthwhile considering the difference between a thread and a challenge and, and how weaknesses or threats can be converted into strengths or opportunities.

After completing the analysis, the participants are asked to take a closer look at the threats and weaknesses. Each group hands out their list to the group sitting next to them. The groups then study each other’s lists and try to come up with different ways to either eliminate these or to convert them into opportunities or strengths. The ideas are written down for future use and the diagrams passed on to the next group, which then develops the ideas further or comes up with new creative solutions. Summarize with group discussion.

Different forms of peer support (4.5 hours)

The following section focuses on planning of the forms of future activities. Peer supporters will learn how to keep others informed of their work and how to identify possible partners. The activities and processes involved in the programme will be integrated into the school’s everyday operations.

The apple tree of my dreams

- **Aim:** To launch the planning of future activities.
- **Length:** 35 minutes.
- **Materials:** Pencils and paper, a CD-player and relaxing music.

**Instructions:** Split the participant into groups on the basis of their first names. Ask the participants to think what their dream schools, and dream classes would be like with relaxing music playing in the background; what would the school community and the breaks be like; how would it be like to attend the school? It is important that the participants are allowed to visualize their future in a stress-free environment and without interruptions.

The participants then draw an apple tree illustrating their dreams. The tree represents the peer supporters’ group and their work. What will make the tree grow? The earth from which the tree grows is made of resources and circumstances that constitute the foundation of peer supporters’ services. The trunk symbolizes peer supporters themselves, while the branches, leaves and apples represent their dreams. What kind of apples will the tree bear?

After the trees are completed, the groups are asked to think what they consider to be the most important apple, or dream. The trainer writes the responses on a flip chart or a whiteboard and continues with the following questions: if the group’s dream is a safe school day, for example, how could it be achieved? What makes a school day safe?

**FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES**

- Give the participants more self-awareness exercises; these can be found later on in the guide.
- Introduce the students to solution-focused thinking.
- Give the students more exercises for practising social and expression skills. You can use exercises from the follow-up courses presented later on in the guide.
- Deepen the group’s knowledge of group processes by discussing group roles and how groups tend to regulate themselves.
Acting together

Aim: To draw up an action plan for the school year.

Length: 55 minutes.

Materials: Pencils and copies of action planning templates.

Instructions: The students are asked to form groups with those participants they have talked the least during the course. The aims of the group were established in the previous activity called ‘The apple tree of my dreams’. In this exercise, the participants are asked to think about various ways of putting their values into practise with the help of the action planning template below.

After finishing the session ask the group to discuss their plans and negotiate which activities they think should be included. Before starting the discussion, the trainer outlines some qualities of a good negotiator. A good negotiator:
- Listens to everyone involved
- Encourages others to contribute and speak up
- Mediates between the negotiating parties
- Provides additional information and new insights into the issues discussed
- Is prepared to compromise without giving in too easily
- Allows the others to deploy and build on his or her ideas
- Accepts the diversity of negotiators and the ideas and views presented by them

Central to the idea of peer support is that peer supporters’ normal school work should not suffer from their involvement in the scheme. The activities organized by peer supporters do not need to be major events, such as theme weeks. Keeping one’s eyes open during the breaks and caring about other students may be equally and often more important in achieving their goals. As organizing a major activity not only requires a lot of resources but also involves the risk of neglecting other important duties, less is more when it comes to planning activities. This means that in practice there can be only one major event per a term. This is worth mentioning as young people would often like to organize more than just one event. Another important aspect is that all activities should be made fun and exciting! The activities will vary from year to year, and the same goes for peer supporters enthusiasm and their commitment to the service.

ACTION PLAN FOR PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMME

1) Aims
What are the aims of the group? The number aims should be limited to about three. During the school year, peer supporters are likely to undertake about four or five different activities, at least one of which may require a major contribution from them. The participants may also need reminding that studying is their first priority.

2) Activities
Which activities should the group undertake to achieve their aims?

3) Who?
The division of labour within the group is worth considering. For example, all peer supporters do not have to act as “buddies” to new intake classes. Make a list of responsible persons; the main responsibility for an activity should be carried and shared by a pair of peer supporters.

4) Where?
Where will the activities take place? In classes, at the school yard or outside the school premises?

5) When?
This column should include a peer support schedule for the school year. Arranging one or two activities during the autumn term and one or two during the spring term will be feasible. Special attention should be paid to time and other resources allowed to the project.

6) Help
What kind of help will peer supporters need? Who will assist and support them? Are there any special equipments or e.g. photocopies necessary for the operation of the service? Will the peer supporters be trained in-house by the staff co-ordinator or by an outside trainer? In what ways will the peer supporters communicate and cooperate with other actors in the school setting (such as members of the student council)?
Together we can

- **Aim:** To identify possible partners and other providers of support services.
- **Length:** 35 minutes.
- **Materials:** Pencils and paper.

**Instructions:** This exercise aims at showing that peer supporters are not working alone, but have a large network of possible partners to turn to.

Participants are asked to draw a network diagram illustrating possible partners, with a peer supporter in the middle of the diagram. Which services and agencies visit the school on a regular basis? What services already exist in the school? Does the school have any special contacts that might prove useful for the peer supporters? Examples of potential partners include the staff, other schools in the neighbourhood, parents and families, local and national charities, as well as congregations and local youth workers. Who can they turn to with issues that may be concerning them? To whom will they refer distressed students or students suffering from loneliness?

The exercise can be expanded by discussing the various types of activities and services that could be undertaken in collaboration with each partner – on-site visits, joint events, expert lectures, etc. The participants can also be asked to think about various ways of financing their activities.

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**Public relations**

- **Aim:** To draw up a public relations plan.
- **Length:** 25 minutes.
- **Materials:** Pencils and large sheets of paper.

**Instructions:** Ongoing publicity and continual communication with the staff and all sections of the school community play an important part in how well the programme will succeed and be sustained. If students and staff are not kept informed about what peer supporters do, their work will be in vain. While communication must not be the most central part of their work, it should be integrated into the everyday workings of the peer supporters.

The trainer asks the group to draw up a public relations plan for the next term or the school year. The plan should address the following questions:

- What will they communicate? All peer supporters should agree on what will be communicated to others.
- When will they communicate? Keeping the staff and students informed from the beginning ensures the planned activities will go as smoothly as possible. The peer students should also agree on principles of post activity reporting.
- What are the most important target groups? Internal communication is communication within the peer supporters’ own group, while external communication is aimed at specific target groups or the whole school.
- How will they communicate? The group should decide on the means and methods used for communication. Which methods will be most effective in reaching students and teachers?
- Who will will communicate? Some group members can be charged with the responsibility of informing the school community about their activities, or they can decide to rotate so each group member is in charge in turn.

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**Evaluation of the scheme**

- **Aim:** To integrate evaluation into peer support.
- **Length:** 30 minutes.
- **Materials:** Pencils and paper.

**Instructions:** Setting up the scheme involves three important stages:
1. Planning
2. Implementation
3. Evaluation

Evaluation, record keeping and monitoring are necessary for assessing and developing the processes and outcomes of a project. Yet despite their obvious importance, these partially overlapping processes are often omitted or neglected. However, evaluation should be made an integral part of the service already at the planning stage. The key stages of evaluation include:

- Evaluation of specific activities: assessing impressions, opinions and attitudes towards an activity organized by peer supporters
- Evaluation of students’ learning: what new information did they learn? How did they learn about an activity?
- Evaluation of the impact of an activity: how did the students feel about an activity? Did it made them to change their views or behaviour?
Evaluation of the long term impact of the programme: does it make a difference?
Evaluation can be done in a number of ways. However, the differences between self-evaluation and external evaluation must be taken into account when planning the evaluation: the participants may have a different interpretation of the activity than the organizers. Ideally evaluation would involve both approaches.

The evaluation plan is integrated into the peer supporters’ action plan. In addition to individual activities, the effectiveness of the scheme itself needs to be judged. The action plan should be seen as a living document that needs to be updated and monitored over time.

Young people can be very critical of their own accomplishments. When evaluating the programme, it must be borne in mind that positive feedback need to outweigh constructive feedback to be able to stimulate the activities. Again, the role played by the staff co-ordinator is crucial.

Feedback

- **Aim:** To give feedback on the course.
- **Length:** 20 minutes.
- **Materials:** Pencils and copies of course evaluations sheets.

**Instructions:** The students are asked to answer the following questions:
- What was the highlight of the course? Why?
- What worked well and less well? Why?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn about the group?
- What new information and skills did you learn?
- Was there anything that was not covered in the course that you would have like to be included?
- What else would you like to say about the course?

The trainer collects the sheets and invites participants to give verbal feedback on the course. However, while verbal feedback should be encouraged, experience has shown that written evaluations are necessary for reviewing and developing activities, materials and approaches involved in the peer support scheme. At this point, peer supporters can also decide on their next meeting and next steps towards setting up the scheme.

A sweets recognition

- **Aim:** To give feedback to other group members.
- **Length:** 20 minutes.
- **Materials:** Bag of sweets.

**Instructions:** Have the group sit in a circle. The trainer then offers a candy to person sitting next to him or her, while at the same time saying something positive about the person concerned. S/he then hands over the candies to person sitting next to him or her, while saying something positive about that participant. This is continued until everyone has received both sweets and positive feedback.

Final hug

- **Aim:** To finish the course with a warm hug.
- **Length:** 5 minutes.

**Instructions:** The participants arrange themselves in a line or a circle so that everyone can give a hug to everyone else. Remember that some people feel uncomfortable with hugging, and would prefer shaking hands or waves. What is important is that everyone says goodbye to others.

Finally, the trainer gives out certificates to the peer students.

**ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES**

- Arrange a visit
- Spend more time on planning future activities
- Find more information on communication and evaluation

Play more games and provide more opportunities for students to practise giving feedback.
Further training on bullying prevention

The basic training session can be followed up with in-depth refresher courses on a wide range of topics. The topics covered can include bullying, friendship, communication and mediation skills, substances, diversity, media literacy, and well-being in schools etc.

Follow-up courses can be provided as one day workshops, take place on different school days, or, alternatively, as a weekend course arranged in liaison with another school in the neighbourhood. Different excursions and visits provide peer supporters with useful insights and can also be incorporated into their further training.

The Mannerheim League for Child Welfare has developed several training courses for peer supporters especially aimed at deepening their skills. This guide contains two further training modules on bullying prevention and emotions. Both modules provide the necessary background information for co-ordinators/trainers and a range of interactive exercises to introduce peer supporters to the topic.

Apart from adding further skills to peer supporters’ repertoire, the courses serve to keep up their enthusiasm for the scheme. Especially those students who are appointed peer supporters in the 8th grade will often benefit from various updating and refresher sessions. Organizing joint courses or workshops with other schools can also prove useful and provide an opportunity to share experiences and ideas.

Recognizing bullying in schools

While teachers do not always recognize bullying, their students do. However, those who get targeted are sometimes reluctant to report bullying because they may be ashamed or afraid that by telling the adults they will end up being bullied even more. Only about one half of the students who get targeted report bullying to other people. Indirect bullying is brought to teachers’ attention more seldom than direct bullying; the victims are more likely to tell their families than their teachers. The younger the students are and the more often they are bullied, the more likely they are to report to their teachers. One of the reasons is that the victims tend to believe that nobody will actually intervene. In fact, only about one half of all students believe that teachers will intervene with bullying.

Although students rarely tell anyone about bullying, teachers can try to find out whether there is anything going on in the class by paying particular attention to what happens during breaks, in the school hallways or in the classrooms before or during classes. Is someone always left outside of the group? Do the students always laugh at someone’s answers? Is there anyone who always, or practically always, remains alone during breaks?

Bullying as a group process

Although the great majority of students do not approve of bullying, many of them act in a way that perpetuates and consolidates the downward spiral of bullying. In fact, group norms within a school play a significant role in both preventing and sustaining bullying. A norm refers to a set of collectively developed, often unspoken rules that guide the group behaviour by defining what is appropriate or inappropriate in particular circumstances. Commitment to group norms serves as a guarantee of an individual’s popularity and status within the group, while failure to comply with the norms will result in disapproval and social sanctions.

According to the official school rules and policies, bullying is clearly wrong – something of which most students are very aware of. However, in addition to explicit rules, our behaviour is governed by implicit, unwritten group rules. These norms are accompanied with social pressure and sometimes even fear of being sanctioned for not conforming to the group’s norms.

Bullying often takes place in front of peers. For bullies, bullying is a way of establishing dominance over others and improving one’s status and popularity within a peer group. The group, in turn, seeks to maintain the status quo as changes in the group dynamics pose a threat to other group members. For instance, if some students decide to speak up for the victim, other students may end up being targeted. In fact, the students want
the bullying to continue and start coming up with reasons why the victim deserves to be bullied. A new informal norm that differs from the official school policy gradually emerges, and eventually the students may not even understand that the victim is being subjected to bullying.

Interacting and discussing with other people help us become aware of our feelings, thoughts, preconceptions and knowledge. Since bullying stems from prejudices, or rumours, it is essential that peer supporters become aware of their own preconceptions. The aim of this course is to interact with other people on the basis of who they are rather than who we think they are. The participants should also be encouraged to take the time to reflect on what they see and hear. For example, it does not pay to believe every bit of gossip we hear or read. We do not have to like everyone or to agree with his or her opinion, but this does not give us the right to harm or bully them.

**Cyber-bullying**

As part of their everyday life, new technology has become an integral part of bullying among students. While there is not much information available on cyber-bullying, it is obvious that bullying too has gone on-line as so many other parts of students’ social lives.

Cyber-bullying – that is to say using of the computers and related technologies to bully or harass other people – takes same forms as bullying in general. The difference is, however, that on-line bullying can take place outside school hours – even when the bullies are the victim’s classmates. Text messages and emails can reach anyone anywhere and 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. In addition, various Internet communities (chat rooms, on-line games, etc.) tend to be more active outside school hours. Examples of cyber-bullying include:

- Sending harassing or intimidating messages
- Spreading rumours and personal information
- Distributing and posting manipulated and modified photos
- Creating and using false identities
- Excluding victims from online groups and communities
- Stealing passwords

As the Internet and mobile phones are rather private means of communication for young people, it is difficult for outsiders to know when this technology is being used for bullying. Children rarely tell their parents what they have witnessed on the Internet.

What makes the Internet to such an attractive platform for bullies is that it is easily accessible and allows anonymity. Not seeing the victim’s reactions makes it difficult for bullies to realize the seriousness of their behaviour. However, Web’s anonymity has its boundaries since cyber-bullies can often be tracked down successfully, even if it may require a police investigation and a suspicion of libel, illicit observation or some other crime.

**The role of peer supporters**

Schools place certain expectations on peer supporters with regard to preventing, recognizing and intervening with bullying. They are expected to see and respond to bullying, but they also play an important role in promoting a positive atmosphere where bullying is not tolerated. Peer supporters can help other students understand that reporting bullying is not tattling but a courageous intervention that demonstrates caring and compassion to others. They can also set an example for the larger school community by giving special attention to students who are feeling lonely or have been excluded from the group. Peer supporters do not have to be everybody’s best friends, but they can show their support by e.g. greeting the bullied student in the school hallways.

However, it is important to remember that although they are encouraged to intervene, it is always at adults’ responsibility to respond and deal with bullying. It is also important to lay down a set of ground rules regarding bullying in the school environment. The rules should define peer supporters’ role in the school’s anti-bullying activities as well as to discuss how and when peer supporters should proceed when they see or hear about bullying. For example, peer supporters can inform the adult co-ordinator, either with the victim’s consent or together with the victim, and the co-ordinator can then decide on measures that need to be taken.
In addition, it is equally important to encourage peer students to report any bullying they witness to adults. For example, a peer supporter can express his or her concern about the bullying to the victim and try to get him or her convinced that the problem should be solved by a reliable adult. Together they can try to think of an adult that could be told about the bullying. Here they should remind the bullied student as well as themselves that reporting bullying is not tattling. However, peer supporters must not betray the victim’s trust and not act without his or her approval.

While peer supporters cannot eliminate bullying on their own, they constitute an important link in the school’s anti-bullying activities. They are favourably placed to recognize bullying during breaks, in the cafeteria or in classrooms, and can refer bullied students on to a staff member – a teacher, the school nurse or some other trustworthy adult. If desired, they can also accompany the victim to an adult staff member or to some other provider of school welfare services.

Training model

This course has been designed as a follow up training for peer supporters. It consists of six sections that focus on bullying prevention. The course lasts six hours and can take place on one or two days. The activities below can be done separately or as part of another course. However, to take the full advantage of the course, it is advisable to do cover all the presented sections.

Warm up

- **Space:** A space that allows participants to move around.
- **Materials:** A CD player and music, a flip chart or blackboard, felt-tip pens or chalks.

**Instructions:** Start with a facilitation exercise intended to “warm up” the group and to encourage the members to share their thoughts and impressions of bullying. The students walk freely in the room with some music playing in the background. Once the music stops, the students turn to a person standing closest to them and shake hands in a reserved manner. After shaking hands, the students are asked to discuss with their pair for 1–2 minutes on the topic given by the trainer. (See below.)

The music then continues, and the students are asked to start walking again. Once the trainer stops the music, the students turn to another person standing next to them, shake hands with their new partner, this time “at lightnings speed”, i.e. as quickly as possible, and discuss on the topic given by the trainer. This is repeated three times so that everybody gets an opportunity to talk with five people. The manners in which the students shake hands vary; the trainer can ask the students to shake hands e.g. “as two very good old friends would do”, or in a “ashamed”, shy’, or ‘cheerful’ manner. The topics for the conversations are as follows:

- What is the difference between bullying and two people having an argument?
- Where and when does bullying occur?
- What types of bullying have you witnessed?
- Do girls and boys bully in the same way?
- What do you think should be covered in this course? (Expectations?)

Write down the expectation on a flip chart or blackboard to be reviewed at the end of the training session when you request feedback.

Straight to the core

- **Space:** A space that allows participants to move around.
- **Materials:** Masking tape, paper.

**Instructions:** The second section of the course will provide the students an opportunity to examine some of the key issues around bullying. The following exercise will allow participants to reflect on their own thoughts and attitudes towards bullying.

At the beginning of the exercise, explain the students that one end of the room represents a 10 and the other end a 1. A 10 means ‘I Fully agree’ and a 1 ‘I Totally disagree’. The numbers can also be marked on the floor with masking tape. The trainer then reads out one of the statements below and asks the students to place themselves on a line according to how much they agree/disagree with the statement. After each statement, the trainer asks some of the students to tell why they chose to stand where
they are and initiates a discussion. However, the trainer should not introduce any facts into the discussion as yet; the focus should be on the students’ own thoughts and opinions. If they so wish, the students may change their place on the floor after the discussion. In stead of standing they can also sit on the floor during the discussions.

Statements:
– There is no bullying in our school
– People respect others in our school
– Sometimes students can be bullies even if they do not really want to
– People do not always realize that they are bullying others
– Bullied children are often themselves responsible for bullying
– Bullies have problems of their own
– Girls bully less frequently than boys
– To be excluded from a peer group is worse than being called a name
– Everyone has a responsibility to intervene with bullying
– It is easy to intervene with bullying
– Adults need to step in to stop bullying wherever it occurs
– Bullies should always be punished
– Parents should be informed if their children are bullies or being bullied
– Teachers and other adults in schools should intervene in incidents of cyber-bullying.

It is important to discuss why the students took the places they did. The trainer may also choose to address only some of the statements presented above or take them up at a later time.

Alternatively the trainer can ask the students to answer to the following questions:
– What kind of emotions did they feel when doing the exercise?
– Did you have a hard time deciding where you should place yourself? If so, why?
– Were the arguments used in the discussion based on facts or feelings?
– Which types of arguments were more effective, those based on facts or those based on feelings?
– Were the statements realistic?
– Did you find the exercise useful?

Tips for the trainer:
– Encourage quiet students to participate and express their views, while, if necessary, holding the more talkative and verbose students back from commenting. In addition, it is important to point out that the statements were meant to be contradictory, but that there was a grain of truth in each statement.
– Students may need to be reminded that it is perfectly normal that different people have different views and preferences. That is why it is important to understand the underlying reasons for people’s views and behaviour. Instead of the method presented above, the trainer can use the following methods:

Four corners
Each corner of the room represents a different degree of agreement/disagreement: for example, ‘Fully agree’, ‘Mostly agree’, ‘Mostly disagree’, ‘Totally disagree’. The students are asked to move to the corner that corresponds with their opinions and tell why they are standing where they are. They can also change their places if they come to think that some other corner would better correspond with their views.

The extremes
The exercise can also be done by allowing the students to choose between two extremes: ‘Fully agree’ and ‘Totally disagree’. As the students cannot place themselves in the middle, this approach forces them to compromise. Again, it is essential to discuss the grounds on which the students agreed/disagreed.
Roles in bullying

**Space**: A space that allow group work.

**Materials**: Pencils and paper, postcards, written descriptions of the various roles associated with bullying.

**THE ROLES**

**Victims** are students who are subjected to systematic, repeated bullying.

**Bullies** start bullying and encourage or even forces others to join in.

**Assistants** of the bully seldom take the initiative to start bullying, but join in once it has begun.

**Reinforcers** provide the audience the bully needs but are not involved in the actual bullying. They encourage the bully by showing their approval by laughing, cheering, or by making comments that stimulate the bullies.

**Defenders** take the victim's side either by trying to make the others stop bullying or in some other way expressing their sympathy for the victim.

**Bystanders** watch or hear the bullying happen but do nothing to stop it. Bystanders often do not realize that their behaviour also contributes to the problem and allow the bullies continue their behaviour.

**Instructions**: Bullying takes place within a group. It does not concern only the bully and the victim, but also other people who witness or are aware of the bullying. The purpose of this exercise is to discuss and help students identify the various roles people in situations that involve bullying. The exercise also improves their understanding of emotions different people involved in bullying may be feeling.

Begin by providing a short description of the roles bullying can take in the school setting, different types of bullying, and the roles students can have in bullying situations. The students are then divided into teams of 3 or 4 by using postcards cut into 3 or 4 different pieces. The pieces are handed out randomly to students, and those who have pieces of the same postcard form a group.

- Each group writes a fictional description of a typical situation involving bullying. The description should contain as much concrete detail as possible, including lines for the characters (in case the description includes verbal bullying). Neither the characters or the stories may relate to real persons or incidents.
- Collect the stories and give each of them back to another group.
- The students then act out the situation described in the story they have received. However, at this point they do not have to come up with a solution to the situation. If some parts of the story are inappropriate or too difficult to act out, the students can tell the story in their own words.
- After each play, the students are asked to identify the different roles the characters had in the bullying. Discuss the background information on the roles with the peer students during the course of the exercise. The roles can also be posted on a flip chart or blackboard for visualization and to sum up the discussion.
- Afterwards discuss the meaning of the different roles in bullying and the emotions each person involved in the situation may be feeling: How does the bully feel? How does the victim feel? How does the reinforcer feel? Etc.
- Afterwards the group can also be asked to come up with possible solutions to the presented situations.

**A letter to myself**

**Materials**: Pencils and paper, envelopes.

**Instructions**: All the students are responsible for intervening with bullying. Peer supporters should inform students about the importance of combating bullying, and pay attention to what goes on in the school community. They can approach lonely students and intervene with bullying incidents. In the last two sections of the course, the students will reflect on their own roles in bullying and bullying prevention.

Ask the students to write a letter to themselves and put it in an envelope. The envelopes are to be opened and the letters read a year later or at some other time the students and the trainee agree on. In their letters the students describe what they will have done to prevent and intervene with bullying during the year. Once they have finished their letters, collect them to be returned to them later on.
Action plan for bullying prevention

**Space:** The space should enable group work, with the group sitting on the floor, on mattresses or at desks.

**Materials:** Pencils and paper.

**Instructions:** The purpose of the course is to equip peer supporters to prevent bullying. In this last section of the course, they will draw up an action plan for bullying prevention.

The action plan can address their buddy classes, specific activities, or peer-led discussions on bullying for students of their parents. The action plan should be made as realistic as possible, and bullying prevention should demonstrate itself in every activity involved in the service. This is also a good opportunity to agree on some ground rules for reporting and intervening with bullying, as well as for monitoring and evaluating the activities involved in the peer support scheme. The action plan can be integrated into the school’s safety plan.

Ending the course

**Space:** The student sit in a circle so that everyone can see each other.

**Materials:** Pencils and paper.

**Instructions:** Ask the students to reflect on what they have learned during the course. Each student will complete the sentences below:

- Today I learned ...
- To prevent people from being bullied I...

Collect the responses and redistribute them so that each students has another student’s response. The responses are then read aloud and the students are asked to discuss whether they have learned the same things, what they wanted get out of the training, what they are going to do the day after the training, and so on. You can also ask them to give written feedback either now or at their next meeting so the students will have time to reflect on the course. This is also a good time to bring up the expectations listed at the start of the course and see whether they have been met.
Further training on feelings and emotional skills

Peer supporters are students who help and support other students, their peers. It is important that they learn to recognize their own emotions so that they can have sympathy for people they interact with. As peer supporters are expected to help victims of bullying, they should also be aware of who is being bullied in the school. While bullied students may content that they wish to be left alone, peer supporters are able to see sadness, fear or shame in the victim’s behaviour. Peer supporters can say: ‘No, I do not want you to be alone.’, but this also needs to be practised.

The exercises in this follow-up course will help peer students recall their feelings and experiences in situations that involve bullying. This training course is intended to provide peer supporters with skills they need in order to identify, express, and deal with their feelings. A skill especially important for a peer supporter is empathy, an ability to identify with others and recognize and respond to their feelings and emotions. As for peer supporters, this means an ability to listen, comfort, support and encourage their peers.

However, peer supporters do not have to be available at all times without interruption. They have to set limits for their service, and this his is where they need the support and experience of their supervisor. In addition to this, they must receive appropriate basic training coupled with follow-up and refresher training courses in issues related to their practice. The framework and the exercises presented in this guide provide one example of how such a course can be constructed and implemented.

Young people may sometimes feel overwhelmed by their emotions. The course aims at helping peer supporters deal with their negative emotions without hurting others and in a constructive manner. Negative emotions will undermine our strength and stamina, as well as destroy our capacity to solve problems and cope with difficult situations. The course provides the students with an opportunity to reflect on things that bring them joy and strength. Experiences of joy and happiness promote a positive and supportive ethos that enables peer supporters to pursue their potential both as students and also as their roles as peer supporters.

Apart from emotional skills, the course aims at improving peer students’ self-awareness and interpersonal skills. Within this context, interpersonal skills are understood as means to express personal feelings, that is to say establishing dialogue, listening to others and expressing one’s thoughts. The course is based on interactive methods that allow the students to learn emotional skills through exercises and by recalling earlier their earlier emotions.

It must however be pointed out that the course is not designed to serve as an introduction of how the students can cope with difficult situations or severe emotional disturbances. Its purpose is to provide an opportunity to discuss and explore emotions in a safe environment. For many of participants, this can be the first time they talk about their feelings aloud. The feedback from participants has also been very positive.

The role of adult supervisor in supporting students

Staff co-ordinator has an important role in encouraging peer supporters, as well as supporting their healthy development. As a co-ordinator you must make a conscious efforts to help them develop their ethical thinking and emotional lives. In addition, you should keep asking yourself constantly what it is they really need rather than what they would like to do.

First duty of a co-ordinator is to be human; being a teacher only comes second. To be able to help peer supporters develop their emotional skills, the co-ordinator needs to reflect on his or her own values and personal goals. Exploring and getting to know your emotions for your own personal growth, but it also enables you to provide the best possible framework for the balanced development of young people. Ideally you should first try the exercises described in this guide on yourself in order to become aware of your own ways of dealing with your emotions. Discussing your emotions with a fellow co-ordinator, from your own school or from some other school in the neighbourhood, will also make it easier for you support and supervise peer students.

It is inevitable that adults working with young people will become a target of their negative feelings and emotional outbursts. However harsh they may be, they should be dealt with in a straightforward
manner, while at the same time understanding that such outburst should not be personalized. Each student should be offered an opportunity to deal with his or her emotions, and your task is to encourage them to explore their feeling and find ways to express them authentically and appropriately.

Peer support is based on the idea of students doing things independently. They must have an adult supervisor, but the role of the supervisor is rather to facilitate and support them, than to control them. Doing things together and encouraging young people to put their ideas into practice is essential for their well-being and learning. Doing things together also creates an atmosphere where mistakes are accepted as an opportunity for learning and not seen as a personal failure.

The most important thing you can do for young people is to be there for them. By taking an interest in what they do, experience and learn, you give them space and a permission to feel a range of emotions. By accepting the students as they are, you will help them accept their own, often changing emotions. In addition, as the students have only just begun to learn emotional skills, you have an important role in naming and identifying different feelings. Express your appreciation and give positive feedback when you see young people trying to use their skills. Positive feedback will help them participate and share their compliments with others. When giving negative feedback, stick to the fact and focus on the problem, not the person getting the feedback.

The emotional turmoil of adolescence

Adolescence is a time of rapid physical, mental, social and sexual growth and development. The changes are of hormonal origins, but have psychological effects as well. Sudden swings and changes of mood, emotions and thoughts are typical of children in their early teens (aged about 12—14). They can become annoyed or upset by people and things that they have never found irritating before, and can have periods of sadness and melancholy. Within a very short time, an adolescent’s mind goes through a series of upheavals. Some people experience it as an extremely confusing time, while others sail through it with little discomfort.

Girls and boys mature at different ages and face different challenges as they develop. In addition, two steps forward in young people’s development are often followed by one step backward. A school class always consists of people going through different stages in their development. As a rule, physical development is always a few steps ahead of emotional development. Young people often find it difficult to understand or put up with his or her own feelings of irritation or restlessness. That is why they are so dependent on the support of their peers and families as well as other adults. Under favourable circumstances, they will be provided the support they need and allowed to enjoy their emotional and physical growth in spite of the many complexities they are facing.

How to define and classify emotions

In everyday speech, we tend to distinguish between ‘heart’ and ‘reason’, with emotions considered to be the opposite of ‘reason’. However, the equal significance of both feelings and reason has been widely recognized. Emotions are not just a by-product of personality; rather, we live, experience and observe through our emotions. The purpose of emotions is not to make us wallow in emotions or release pressure. They are vital to our existence and tell us what really matters or does not matter.

Basically, emotions are either good or bad. The basic emotions include fear, anger, joy, grief, shame, love and confusion; some also consider trust a basic feeling. Emotions manifest themselves in three different ways: (1) physically (chemistry, brain activity); (2) as experiences (internal experience); and (3) as social activity (behaviour, facial expressions, language, words). Emotions are personal: different situations can elicit different feelings in different people. In addition, feelings are usually very physical: Fear sets in our stomach; our heart is full of joy; we can hardly breathe with excitement; we flush with anger and shake with grief etc.

Positive emotions release our energy and make it easier for us to interact and work with others. They help us take the initiative and solve problems, while at the same time encouraging us to help each other and to try new things.

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Communication of feelings is about identifying each other’s emotional states. Moods and atmospheres are easy to sense as warm or cold; we can also sense each other’s sympathies or antipathies. Human interaction always elicits emotional states that are easily transmitted from one person to another. Some people find it easy to share other people’s feelings in social situations. Communication of feelings also includes an ability to relate to other people, often referred to as empathy.

Moods and emotions are contagious. Sometimes we pick up other people’s feelings without even noticing that they are part of the ongoing non-verbal communication between us. The flow of emotional signals we send to each other never stops, but the better social skills we have the easier it is for us to control the intensity of those signals.

Peer supporters play an important role in conveying positive emotions to the entire school community. The way we interpret feelings depends on the circumstances where it emerges and is recognized. Positive feelings can also be collective, such as togetherness and group acceptance.

Allowing all members of a group to be themselves promotes happiness for the entire group, which is why it is important for the peer supporters to feel good about their group. The entire group should therefore discuss what would make them feel good. One such thing is that people are allowed to make mistakes and have different emotions. The peer supporters can discuss this aim with their “buddy” classes and spread their joy and their positive attitudes to other students.

Feelings that are commonly considered negative include anger, disgust, shame, fear, pain, failure or the feeling of being misunderstood. Negative feelings are important in that they tell us when to interrupt an unsatisfactory action. For example, anger can prepare us to remove an obstacle from our life; fear suggest that we should retreat from a situation. Recognizing or analysing negative feelings is not always easy as they may be rooted in painful experiences, but is crucial as these feelings can prevent us from indulging in other activities.

Anger, or aggression, is both a resource and a catalyst. It makes us stand up for ourselves, change the world, prevent bullying, and fight for a cause. It also gives us the strength to run away in situations where it is better to retreat than a fight. Aggression is something we can learn to live with, but we also have to learn to deal with it. It must be kept in mind that even negative feelings serve a purpose. Everyone should find a way to deal with their negative feelings.

How to express our feelings

Our feelings do not always show to other people. Expressing our feelings is not always easy but it can be practised. We can learn emotional skills in situations that make us experience different feelings. Practising these skills will improve our ability to communicate our feelings and help us cope better with difficult situations. We can always improve our social-emotional skills by encountering other people and listening them. While peer supporters are often motivated by a willingness to help others, they will benefit from practising offering and receiving help.

Expressing our feelings means showing our feelings; it means making other people aware of our feelings by describing them, discussing them and by using gestures and facial expressions. Some feelings can be physically clearly visible.

We can only talk about our feelings if we have recognized them and are able to name them, which often happens only after the actual outburst, when we are better able to analyse the difficult or painful feelings. Describing our feelings can enable us to see whether we have understood them correctly. Of course, we can also analyse them quietly in our minds without actually sharing our feelings with anyone.

People sometimes seem to think that some ways of expressing our feelings are superior to other. In our western culture, speech is considered the highest form of expressing our feelings, even to such an extent that the actual experience of such feelings is neglected. How we express our feelings is determined by our biology, temperament, culture and the actual situation where the feeling emerges. To say that we are very upset is not necessarily any more real than actually being upset but not being able to express it. Discussing our feelings does not automatically mean that we have recognized a particular feeling or are able to deal with it.

We can all decide how we deal with our feelings and whether we should punch or hug each other, show our affection for each other or conceal it. However, we cannot always decide what we should feel. We live, observe and experience through our feelings, while some of them can directly attributed to our physiology. Yet if we can control our feelings, they will not make us behave in a desperate, self-destructive or anti-social manner or in a manner. We are entitled to all kinds of emotions, but we are bound to express them within certain limits.
Empathy

Empathy means ability and willingness to identify with other people, recognize each other’s feelings and respond to them. It is an ability to comfort, encourage, support and cheer up other people. Showing empathy does not always require words; simply being there for someone is enough. A relationship built on trust allows us to talk about difficult things. It is also important to join in each other’s happiness – though sometimes that may be more difficult than trying to ease a person’s pain.

Whether we get along with other people depends on whether we are genuinely interested in them and can identify with them. It means blending in and getting along with people who are different to ourselves. Our social skills enable us to better interpret other people’s behaviour, make us more finely tuned in to their messages and help us adjust to different situations in different groups without losing our own individuality.

Empathy is based on self-awareness. The better we understand our own feelings, the better we can read those of others. Empathy is essential for smooth social interaction and reconciliation of different emotions. However, learning empathy can prove difficult, as it requires personal experience of the feelings or life situation the other person is going through. We can learn to be more empathetic by placing ourselves in other people’s positions, relating to their emotional lives and listening to each other. In school setting, students can learn empathy through the example of their supervisors; the empathy they receive from their peers is also important.

In recent years, there has been a lot of discussion on emotional intelligence; that is to say an ability to interpret and influence both our own and other people’s feelings, and the ability to apply our feelings to our thinking. Emotional intelligence – or the lack of it – is demonstrated through emotional intelligence skills: an ability to maintain and foster our relationships, an ability to feel affection, and an ability to feel empathy. Emotional intelligence skills improve our self-awareness and self-confidence, while helping us see things from other people’s perspectives.

Emotional intelligence is usually divided into five areas: (1) an awareness of our feelings; (2) an ability to control our emotions; (3) an ability to identify the underlying reasons for other people’s behaviour; (4) an ability to recognize other people’s feelings; and (5) an ability to nurture our relationships. Of course, no one can fully master all these areas. For example, some people may be good at coping with their own anxieties but are less able to comfort or encourage other people.

Training model

The 6-hour training course presented here consists of seven parts and contains a wide range of exercises in handling and expressing personal feelings. The exercises can take less or more day depending of the group’s need and the number of students participating.

The aim of the course is to strengthen the students’ emotional skills and to equip them with skills they need to plan, name, and deal with their own as well as other people’s feelings. The course also aims at increasing the cohesion of the group.

Warming

The course begins with a warm-up exercise designed to create a friendly atmosphere. Depending on the group, the trainer can include other warm-up activities presented in the previous section of this guide.

The circle of names and feelings

- **Aim:** To learn each other’s names.
- **Length:** 15 minutes.
- **Space:** Sitting in a circle, either on chairs or on the floor.

**Instructions:** If the students do not know or cannot remember each other’s names, begin the course with introductions. The students arrange themselves in a circle. The first student says his or her name, adding to it an adjective beginning with the initial letter of his or her name and describing a feeling, e.g. Happy Helen. The person sitting next to him or her repeats that name and adds his or her own name and an adjective in the same manner: Happy Helen, Cheerful Charlie. The last student says everybody else’s names as well as his or her own name and an adjective in the same manner: Happy Helen, Cheerful Charlie. The last student says everybody else’s names as well as his or her own, and so on. During the exercise, the trainer can also do ‘spot checks’ and ask other students to say the others’ names and feelings, as names are always easier to memorize if they are repeated. If someone cannot think of a feeling beginning with the same letter as his or her name, use the enclosed list of feelings (Appendix 1) at the end of this guide.
Evolution of feelings

Aim: To warm up, get settled in the course room, meet the other students on the course and focus on thinking about feelings. Much laughter and funny encounters should ensue.

Length: 15 minutes.
Space: Enough space to move freely around.

Instructions: A variation of the game called Evolution, where the players evolve from amoebae into human beings, this exercise is about letting feelings evolve from anger into happiness.

The students move about in the room and make noises and gestures related to the feelings they are supposed to have. The first feeling is anger. Each pair of students plays a round of rock-paper-scissors (RPS), the winner of which can take on a ‘higher’ feeling. After this, everyone plays another round of RPS with someone else showing the same feeling as themselves, with the winner moving to a higher level again and the loser falling down one level. After reaching the highest level, happiness, the students can return to their seats.

The emotions shown in this exercise are:

Anger: Look angry and punch your fists in the air.
Fear: Keep your head down and hide your face in your hands.
Pride: Brag about and toss your head.
Grief: Wipe your tears and look unhappy.
Love: Smile broadly and place your hands on your heart.
Happiness: Go back to your place.

RPS rules
Each game of RPS starts with the players holding their hand squeezed in a fist and counting aloud to three, each time swinging their fist down on the count. On “three” the players change their hands into one of the three gestures: a rock (clenched fist), paper (open hand with fingers together) or scissors (the index finger and the middle finger forming the letter V). Rock defeats scissors (a real stone could break a real pair of scissors, and scissors could never cut stone), paper defeats rock (paper captures or covers rock) and scissors defeats paper (they cut paper). If the players use the same gesture at the same time, the game is tied and played again.

Mood colours

Aim: To form home groups.

Materials: Sheets of paper in different colours.

Instructions: Having some of the discussions in smaller groups will allow the students to express themselves more freely. Use sheets of paper in different colours (e.g. purple, pink, blue, yellow) to form groups of 4—6 participants: Cut the sheets into as many pieces as there should be people in a team and let everyone choose a piece in a colour that reflects their current moods best. Students who chose pieces in the same colour form a group and are asked to come up with a name for their group that is in some way connected to the colour and the feeling associated with it.

Identifying different feelings

The second section of the course focuses on basic feelings and emotions. This part of the course aims at improving the students’ ability to identify and name their feelings.

Deep into feelings

Aim: To understand the nature of different feelings and to identify and name one’s own feelings.

Length: 20 minutes.

Materials: A flip chart or blackboard. Four pencils or chalks in different colours.

Space: A space that allows group discussion, with the students sitting in a circle.

Instructions: Ask the students to recall as many of their own feelings as possible from the day before, from morning till night. Write the responses on a flip chart or whiteboard. When all the feelings have been named, the students can see a wide spectrum of emotions ranging from one end to another. Explain to the students that:

– Everyone has feelings
– All feelings are legitimate
– Feelings can be very different from each other

Return to the responses and ask the students to name those emotions that they could feel physically. First, draw a coloured circle around each such feeling. Second, ask which emotions were visible to others and draw circles around them in
a different colour. Third, ask which emotions were accompanied by an urge to take action, and draw a circle around those emotions in a third colour. Fourth, ask which emotions went unnoticed by others, and use a fourth colour for them. Tell the students that a feeling that a person has can go unnoticed by others, while another person having the same feeling can start behaving in a way that makes the feeling clear to everyone else. One feeling can therefore have up to four circles around it.

Explain that most emotions are like icebergs in that they lie mostly beneath the surface. We often see only the peak of each other’s anger, while remaining unaware of the real proportions of our emotions. In other words, anger is made up of several different feelings. To understand that our anger consists of several other feelings provides us with an opportunity to better deal with it and contributes to our understanding of what these other feelings might be: envy, frustration, disappointment? The iceberg will be easier to melt if we can tackle the individual feelings one by one. No feeling is ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ - there are simply feelings that exist only as long as they do.

The basic feelings are fear, anger, happiness, grief, shame, love, trust and confusion. (Appendix 2)

Tribes of feelings

► Aim: To identify feelings that are related to each other and to improve the students’ vocabulary of emotions.
► Length: 20 minutes.
► Materials: Pieces of string, paper, pencils, a flip chart or blackboard.
► Space: A space that allows working in pairs and a group discussion.

Instructions: Divide the students into pairs as follows: Cut string (or narrow strips of cloth e.g.) into pieces of about 1 metre long each. There should be as many pieces of string as there will be pairs. Collect the pieces, and hold them in your hands so that both ends of a piece are equally long. Each student takes one end of a string and forms a pair with the student holding the other end. The students will be working with these partners for the rest of the course.

While emotions are often divided into “feeling good” and “feeling bad”, humans display a wide variety of different emotions. Ask the students to write down emotions related to joy on one sheet of paper and emotions related to grief on another sheet of paper. Alternatively, the students can write down their feelings in their workbooks. Give them about 7 minutes to do this.

Now ask the students to read aloud which emotions associated with happiness they have come up with, and write these on whiteboard. Then ask them to read aloud the emotions associated with grief, and write these on another board. This part of the exercise should take about 7 minutes.

Emotions and situations

► Aim: To grasp that there are different feelings attached to different places.
► Length: 20 minutes.
► Materials: Pencils and paper, chalks, coloured pencils and felt-tip pens.
► Space: A space that allows independent work and group discussion.

Instructions: In this third exercise, the students are asked to write down places and feelings they associate with these places. They can also think about the reasons why they attach particular feelings to particular places. Instead of words, the students can also use pictures and symbols. Read out the places listed below one at a time and time them about 2 minutes for working each place.

What feelings do you have about:
– Your home?
– Your room?
– Your school?
– Your grandparents’ house (or the house of your godparents or other adults you are close to)?
– An Internet communities you belong to?
– Your summer cottage, caravan site, camp centre or other place where you spend time during summer breaks?
– Your local youth club?

Ask the students to complement the list by adding other places that may be important to them. Finally, ask them to think about a place they could consider as their refuge – a place where they can be at peace with their own feelings and themselves, a place where they find it easiest to reflect on their own feelings.

Sum up the main points that were made during the exercise.
How to express our feelings

The third part of the course is concerned with expressing our feelings. The focus of this part is on practising listening, expression of emotions, and identifying non-verbal messages.

Hello, are you listening?

**Aim:** To practice listening, to understand the importance of listening and what it is like to be heard.

**Length:** 20 minutes.

**Space:** The students sit in pairs.

**Instructions:** The students work with the same partners as in the previous exercise. Ask them to think back to an event from the past few weeks that involved a feeling, either positive or negative. Next ask one partner to tell his or her story of such an event, while the other partner is asked not to listen. After a while, they swap roles and repeat the exercise. Recap by discussing what it feels like not being listened to and ask whether this is something that also happens in real life.

In the second stage of the exercise, both partners tell the same story, with one partner telling the story and the other one interrupting him and beginning to talk about something else. After a while, ask them to switch roles. Recap by discussing how it felt to be ignored and whether this could also happen in real.

In the third stage of the exercise, both partners will listen to each other’s story. Recap by discussing how it felt to be listened to. When everybody has had a chance to express themselves, ask them how they could tell that their partner was actually listening.

Remind the students of the acronym ‘SOFTEN’ introduced during the basic training course. Also remind the about the importance of listening. People need to be heard because it helps them open up emotionally. Describing our negative feelings helps us analyse them, and sharing our positive feelings will cheer up others as well. Talking about our feelings is a learning process for both the speaker and the listener. We learn both about ourselves and about the other person; at the same time, we also learn how to deal with similar situations in the future.

Tell the students about the contagious nature of emotions. We start to feel happy when we are surrounded by happy people; and we start to feel sad if we are surrounded by depressed people. By being happy, both as individuals and as a group, peer supporters can spread happiness and well-being in the school. The students should also be reminded of the importance of guarding themselves against negative emotions. Instead of being constantly exposed to depressive persons, they should also meet with people who spread happiness and strength.

Mirrors

**Aim:** To practice focusing on another person, working together and encountering another person. The exercise also serves to illustrate the significance of non-verbal communication.

**Length:** 5 minutes.

**Space:** Enough space to move.

**Instructions:** The students work with the same partners as in the previous exercise. They stand opposite to their partners with their hands reaching forward and their fingertips almost touching their partners. One partner starts moving his or her hand slowly, while the other imitates the movement as a mirror image. When their mirror is beginning to work, they can move other parts of their bodies as well. Speaking is not allowed, and after a while, the students swap roles. Sum up by asking how the students felt doing the activity.

Mixed messages

**Aim:** To identify possible conflicts between emotions and verbal communication.

**Length:** 15 minutes.

**Space:** A space where the groups can act, move about and play.

**Materials:** Copies of the mood cards in Appendix 3.

**Instructions:** There are two sets of cards used in this exercise. One set of the card contains phrases referring to a feeling, while the other set contain names of feelings. This exercise should be done among the home groups. Each team gets 12 cards with sentences and 12 cards with names of feelings. Each member of the group picks up one card from both sets and reads out the sentence three times in a tone that reflects the feeling named in the other card. The others will try to
guess the name of the feeling on the basis of the speaker’s body language. Play two rounds so that everyone gets to read out two different sentences.

Afterwards discuss whether it was easy to do this exercise. Was easy to recognize the feelings conveyed? Numerous studies have shown that non-verbal communication accounts for more than 90 per cent of all human communication. While the percentage ascribed to non-school communication vary somewhat in different studies, it is generally agreed that most human communication is indeed non-verbal.

The basic emotions are the easiest to identify irrespective of our age, race, culture or gender. Surprise, fear, anger, repulsion, disgust, happiness and grief are the easiest to read in our faces. Anger is the easiest to recognize, because it draws more attention from another person than e.g. happiness. On the other hand, some people are good at hiding their emotions, while others expose all their emotions to everyone. For example, Finns tend to be much more reserved about showing their emotions than the Italians. In addition, people interpret each other’s facial expressions better if they already know each other. It is also important to keep in mind that the credibility of a person’s verbal communication depends on its correspondence with his or her non-verbal communication.

**Empathy**

The fourth section of the course focuses on empathy, the ability and willingness to identify with another people and to recognize and respond to their feelings. For peer supporters, this can be understood as an ability to comfort, encourage, support and cheer up others.

**Feelings on the beach**

**Aim:** To increase peer supporters’ understanding of other students’ school related experiences.

**Length:** 55 minutes.

**Materials:** Soft music.

**Space:** At the start of the exercise, you will need a room for calm, individual reflection, possibly with mattresses or cushions. At the end of the exercise, you will need a room for group discussion and working in home teams.

**Instructions:** Begin by inviting the students on an imaginary trip to a situation where they have received help and empathy from someone. Make sure that the room is quiet and peaceful; play some soft music and dim the lights, if necessary. Speak in a soft, relaxed voice, pausing every now, allowing the students to develop images in their minds. Start reading the following story aloud when everyone has settled down comfortably. Reading the story will take about ten minutes:

*Make yourself comfortable and close your eyes. Concentrate on listening to my voice and my voice alone. All other sounds and noises in your environment are coming from somewhere very far away and not disturbing you at all. Listen to the sound of your own breathing as it slowly becomes steady and deep. You are now slowly getting deeper and deeper into a more and more relaxed state, feeling calm and peaceful. Each breath you take will make you even more relaxed and peaceful. Let your mind relax, too. Imagine you are walking in the woods on a beautiful summer day. If you like, you can even imagine taking off your shoes and feel the soft, warm, green moss under your feet. (Pause) Stop for a moment and take a look around in the woods. See the green summer surrounding you, and breath in the soft scents of summer. (Pause) You are walking along the path in the woods. You now come to a warm beach with the finest, softest, whitest sand you can imagine. If you like, you can sit down and feel the warm summer breeze on your face. (Pause) You can even go and test the warm water of the lake. Enjoy this wonderful, relaxed moment on the quiet, peaceful beach.*

Let the students dwell on these and any other pleasant images in peace. After a while, continue reading the story.

*In your mind, try to think back to a situation where someone has listened to you and understood you when things have been difficult for you. What had happened just before the situation? Where were you? (Pause) Try to think back how it felt to have someone actually listen to you and understand how you felt. (Pause) What was comforting to you? (Pause) What gave you hope? (Pause) What cheered you up? (Pause) How did you feel about that person?*
‘In a few moments, when you return from this imaginary trip, remember the feeling and bring it back with you – the feeling you got from being genuinely heard and understood.

‘Return to the beach. Sit down for a while to enjoy the sun and the air (Pause.) Now get up and walk back to the woods and to the same path. (Pause) Take a few deep, calm breaths. Each breath will make you stronger and stronger. You can move your fingers and toes a little now. At your own pace, stretch yourself out a bit, and slowly open your eyes. At your own pace, get up and look around. You feel relaxed and ready to continue with your work.’

Recap by discussing the feeling we get when someone shows empathy toward us. How could we show empathy to others? How could we comfort, encourage or support others? In what kind of situations can peer supporters feel empathy for others? The discussion should last no longer than 10 minutes.

After the discussion, the students go back to their home group and try to think of concrete situations where they might show empathy to others. They are asked to write short plays on the basis of their discussions and perform them to other groups. Recap after the plays or, if necessary, after each play. It is likely that bullying will be one of the issues covered in the plays. Here you can remind the students about peer supporters’ role in preventing and combating bullying. However, the comfort and support offered to a bully victim are equally important. Peer supporters can also accompany the victim to a teacher or a staff coordinator.

How to stick up for ourselves and deal with our negative feelings?

The fifth section of this course is about sticking up for ourselves without hurting others. While we do not have to change our minds to please others, the key to a successful communication is a willingness to seek consensus. In addition, this section also discusses negative emotions and how they can be dealt with in a constructive manner.

I’m going – No, you’re not

► Aim: To stick up for oneself.
► Length: 10 minutes.
► Space: A room for working in pairs and having a group discussion.

Instructions: The students work with the same pair as in the previous exercise. Each pair will engage in an argument where one partner says ‘I’m going’ over and over again, and the other one keeps responding ‘No, you’re not’. Once all pairs have had this argument, ask for volunteers to enact their argument in front of others. If several pairs volunteer, you can have more performances. After the performance ask the group if it became clear whether the one partner would eventually leave or not? Also tell the students that it is important to stick up for ourselves in a constructive manner. While we do not have to change our minds to please others, the key to a successful communication is willingness to seek consensus. Discuss together what makes a person assertive and what body language is.

You can also point out that it is important to stand up for our rights, and yet take other people’s rights into account. Sticking up for ourselves and maintainable calm is not always easy; it is far more common for people to try to get their way by behaving aggressively, using violence, and by making it clear to others that their views and wishes are less important. Being attacked and argued with can be such an intimidating experience that we will rather give in than be open and honest about what we really want or think. We need to learn how to defend our rights calmly and without hurting others. No concern is too small to be discussed, and addressing minor disputes and misunderstandings early will prevent them from escalating and developing into crisis. The disputing parties should be encouraged to settle their their arguments by themselves, but asking an outsider to act as a mediator is certainly not wrong.
Negative feelings

**Aim:** To understand that negative feelings serve an important purpose, and to find ways to deal with them.

**Length:** 30 minutes.

**Materials:** Pencils and paper, flip chart sheets, masking tape, felt-tip pens or chalks.

**Space:** A spacious room that allow working in pairs.

**Instructions:** Explain to the students that negative feelings can drain our strength and stamina. Feelings cannot be automatically switched off, thrown into the litter bin or deleted with the press of a button. Grief and other negative feelings need to be experienced and dealt with. We grieve for someone because that person was important and close to us. Dealing with our negative feelings will make us stronger; and a failure to do so will allow them to pile up and sustain. However, provided that we work through our feelings properly, we can put them away instead of carrying them with us for a long time. After all, we have a large stock of feelings anyway and can employ them later if we need to. Ask the students what situations they think give rise to a feeling of anger. Recognizing our anger is important when we need to defend ourselves or run away from a situation, whereas envy is something that can make us try to succeed even harder. It’s always important to find a middle way rather than overlay our emotions.

Ask the students to think about different ways of analysing negative emotions. Make a list containing the positive ways on one side of the paper and a list containing negative ways on the other side of the paper. Ask them to think of as many ways as possible. The introduction to the topic and the making of the lists should take no longer than about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, tape four flip chart sheets, for example, end to end on the floor with masking tape so that they form a long line. When all pairs have finished their lists, ask the whole group to write down their responses on a flip chart sheets with the most positive ways at one end of the line and the most negative ways at the other. The less intense ways should be placed closer to the midpoint of the line. The location for each suggestion is decided on together. The students may also draw pictures and symbols on the flip chart sheets. The sheets represent a compromise reached by all students.

At this point, ask whether all the suggestions have been written down. Explain that it is all right to disagree on where the suggestions should be placed.

Different approaches work differently for different people. Some of us need to talk to someone right after an incident, while others prefer going for a run or chopping wood before starting to work through the issue.

**Recalling and processing emotions**

The sixth section of the course focuses on recalling feelings and attaching them to specific situations.

**A room of feelings**

**Aim:** To recall feelings and connect them with different situations.

**Length:** 30 minutes.

**Materials:** Soft music, sheets of paper.

**Space:** Each of the four corners of the room represents a specific feeling. There should be enough space for the students to move around. Keep the lights dimmed and play some soft music.

**Instructions:** Place a sheet of paper containing a name of a feeling – grief, happiness, anger or success – in each of the four corners of the room. Keep the lights dimmed and create as peaceful an atmosphere as possible. Play some soft music in the background, if you like. The students walk about in the room and visit each corner in an individual order. They stand in a corner for as long as it takes to detect the feeling placed in that corner in themselves, and then move to another corner to detect another feeling. This part of the exercise will not take longer than 5 minutes.

Afterwards discuss each emotion and whether the students detected the in themselves. What was the feeling like? Let them to unfold their stories in their own way. You can also discuss identification of feelings. In one of the earlier exercises, you talked about the purpose of anger and envy e.g. However, recalling feelings of happiness and achievement are also important. How could the students transfer the feelings in the corners to themselves? How can we recall feelings of joy or success in general? Ask the students whether they have experienced other connections between certain feelings and situations. Does a specific song, a person, a sound or an image elicit their feelings? Do they have a talisman, a lucky piece of clothing or something else they carry with them to ensure that they will succeed at their exams?
Sparks of happiness

- **Aim:** To make the students aware of things that make them happy.
- **Length:** 15 minutes.
- **Materials:** Soft music, pencils and paper.
- **Space:** A room where everyone can work quietly on their own, possibly with soft music in the background.

**Instructions:** Explain that thoughts, feelings, moods and actions are closely interconnected. Trying to force ourselves to feel something specific is difficult. We can, however, steer our emotions and moods in other ways. It is also important to do things we enjoy when we think we feel too tired or rotten to do anything. Ask the students to think about times when they have felt too miserable to be able to do something they normally enjoy. Or have they felt miserable because they could not do something they enjoy to do? We cannot simply decide to feel better by snapping our fingers, but we can do something that we enjoy and that makes us feel better.

What we enjoy doing and what makes us happy are highly personal things: what some of us consider fun can be totally meaningless to others. However, there are things that most of us enjoy: watching TV, listening to the radio, listening to music, meeting friends, taking care of a pet, walking outdoors, exercising, resting, eating good food, etc. People often think that the best things must be something big and unique, such as winning in a lottery, falling in love or travelling around the world. But good things do not have to be anything huge and special – everyday things can be equally enjoyable. To maintain our mental well-being, we must have little things that are enjoyable and frequent enough in our lives.

Ask each student to make a list of things they enjoy. The lists are personal, but if the atmosphere is right, you can ask them how it felt to do the lists. Was it easy to think of things that they enjoyed? Remind the students that they should aim at doing at least of the things in their list a day.

Giving and receiving feedback

The final section of the course provides an opportunity for both the trainer and the students to give and receive feedback. This section also marks the end of the course.

A minute for myself

- **Aim:** To learn how to give and receive positive feedback.
- **Length:** 15 minutes.
- **Materials:** A stopwatch or another watch with a second hand.
- **Space:** A room that allows group discussion, with chairs in circle.

**Instructions:** Begin by discussing the importance of positive feedback. Remind the students of the Johari Window introduced during the basic training course.

Ask the students which quadrant they think should be the largest. The correct answer is the open quadrant. Positive relationships expand our open quadrant and reduces both our blind quadrant and our hidden quadrant. We gradually gain more self-awareness and self-confidence, find it easier to express our thoughts and feelings, and improve our interpersonal skills. We will find it easier to be ourselves in different situations. For all this, we need each other: we need to receive positive feedback from each other and prove ourselves worthy of each other’s friendship. This is the only way we can develop and help others grow and develop. (10 minutes)

The students then return to their home groups. Ask the students to think about the members of their own home groups and come up with something positive about each member: something that a member had said during the course, their character or behaviour, their clothes or hair – anything, as long as it can be considered positive. Time them around a minute to think about what to say. Repeat around the circle until everyone has received his or her feedback.

Sum up with a brief discussion on what it felt like to receive and give positive feedback.
End circle

- **Aim:** To give feedback on the course.
- **Length:** 10 minutes.
- **Space:** A room that allows group discussion, with chairs placed in a circle.

**Instructions:** Ask the students to take turns in describing how they can use the experiences gained from this course in their peer supporter roles.

You are a nice person

- **Aim:** To give and receive positive feedback.
- **Length:** 10 minutes.
- **Materials:** Copies of the Nice Person form (see Appendix 4).
- **Space:** A space that allows group work with chairs placed in a circle.

**Instructions:** Give everyone a copy of the Nice Person form and ask them to write their own name on the line at the top of the form. Each student then passes the form on to the person sitting on their left; on the form they receive from the person sitting on their right, they will write something positive about the person concerned – his or her qualities, personality or something else they have learned from the person concerned during the course. Each student will also sign their name at the bottom of the form. The completed forms can be handed out to the students as ‘course diplomas’. Remind the students that we can always develop further our skills in recognizing our feelings and showing them to others. No one’s skills are ever fully complete.

The knot

- **Aim:** To create a feeling of togetherness at the end of the course.
- **Length:** 15 minutes.
- **Space:** Enough space for the students to move during the exercise.

**Instructions:** Thank the group and give positive feedback on its accomplishments. The course ends with one or several rounds of ‘the knot’: One of the students leaves the room, while the others stand in a circle, join hands, swap places, and form a tight knot without letting go of each other’s hands. When the knot is ready, the student is called back into the room and asked to untangle the knot.
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Adjectives for feelings

Abandoned  Delighted  Ghastly  Melancholic  Subdued
Absorbed  Delightful  Gleeful  Merry  Sullen
Admiring  Depressed  Gloomy  Miserable  SunnySunny
Aggrieved  Desolate  Grateful  Nervous  Sure
Agitated  Desperate  Grave  Outraged  Surprised
Airy  Despondent  Grievous  Peaceful  Suspicious
Angry  Devoted  Grumpy  Peppy  Sweet
Annoyed  Displeased  Happy  Perplexed  Sympathetic
Appalled  Doubting  Harsh  Playful  Thrilled
Appreciative  Dour  Haughty  Pleasant  Timid
Baffled  Downcast  Hesitant  Pleased  Tranquil
Belligerent  Dull  Hopeful  Positive  Trustful
Bleak  Embarrassed  Horrific  Powerful  Trusting
Blissful  Empathetic  Horrified  Proud  Unclear
Boisterous  Empty  Hostile  Provoked  Unhappy
Boring  Energetic  Humble  Puzzled  Uninterested
Bored  Enthusiastic  Impatient  Quick  Unsatisfied
Brave  Euphoric  Incredulous  Repentant  Unsure
Brilliant  Excited  Indecisive  Restless  Unsuspecting
Bubbly  Expectant  Independent  Rough  Uptight
Busy  Fascinated  Injured  Sad  Vigorous
Calm  Fascinating  Insulted  Safe  Vivacious
Cheerful  Favourable  Irritated  Satisfied  Warm
Close  Fearful  Jealous  Serene  Wild
Comforting  Fearless  Jolly  Shady  Wistful
Confused  Firm  Joyful  Shaky  Wonderful
Congenial  Foolhardy  Joyous  Shocked  Wondering
Courageous  Friendly  Loathing  Shy  Worried
Cross  Frightened  Lonely  Solemn  Worthless
Decisive  Funny  Longing  Sprightly  Strong
Dedicated  Furious  Lovable  Steady  Sub-Dedicated
Defiant  Genuine  Loving  Sure  Sunny
Basic feelings

- **Anger**: rage, resentment, disgust, repulsion, vexation, irritation, irritation, aggravation, and the extreme feelings of hostility and violence
- **Grief**: Sorrow, dejection, sullenness, sadness, weariness, worry, melancholy, self-contempt, loneliness, despair, depression
- **Fear**: terror, dread, anxiety, anxiety, worry, suspicion, horror, and the extreme feeling of panic.
- **Joy**: happiness, contentment, serenity, light-heartedness, vitality, pleasure, enthusiasm, exaltation, euphoria
- **Love**: approval, friendliness, closeness, trust, kindness, devotion, appreciation, admiration, adoration, bewitchment, surrender
- **Confusion**: surprise, shock, amazement, bewilderment
- **Shame**: guilt, embarrassment, mortification, remorse, humiliation, contrition
# Mixed messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joy</th>
<th>Fear</th>
<th>Anger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Surprise</td>
<td>Disgust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrassment</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Envy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Shame</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- I love you.
- I hate you.
- I’m afraid of the dark.
- That was funny.
- I think spiders are disgusting.
- What a nice surprise.
- I’m proud of you.
- I know how you must feel.
- Who does he think he is?
- Oh no, they didn’t see me do that, did they?
- That was stupid of me.
- I feel so sad.
You are a nice person because:

\[
\text{date} \quad \text{place}
\]
This guide book provides plenty of information about peer support scheme in Finnish schools and directions how to get started and organise such schemes. The guide book entails a description of the roles of the staff co-ordinator and the peer supporter. It also includes a hands-on guide for a basic training course and further training courses on bullying prevention and emotional skills for peer students.

This book is a compilation of a variety of material originally published in Finnish by MLL, with some additions for the benefit of foreign readers. We hope that the content is useful to schools and other organizations to start and develop peer support programmes.