



## Peer support for children and young people's mental health - Girlguiding Response March 2016

### About Girlguiding

1. Girlguiding is the leading charity for girls and young women in the UK, with over 500,000 members. Thanks to the dedication and support of 100,000 amazing volunteers, we are active in every part of the UK, giving girls and young women a space where they can be themselves, have fun, build brilliant friendships, gain valuable life skills and make a positive difference to their lives and their communities. We build girls' confidence and raise their aspirations. We give them the chance to discover their full potential and encourage them to be a powerful force for good. We give them a space to have fun. We run Rainbows (5-7 years), Brownies (7-10 years), Guides (10-14 years) and The Senior Section (14-25 years). Girls in guiding usually meet in groups weekly, these groups are referred to as units through this document. Registered Charity No 306016. [www.girlguiding.org.uk](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk)
2. Girlguiding's evidence includes discussion of our peer education programme, the peer support this can facilitate and stimulate, and the peer support that Girlguiding's structure enables.
3. We recognise there is a distinction between peer education and peer support. The learnings from our peer education model have relevance to peer support programmes.

### **Peer support - your views and experiences**

*These questions are about your experiences of peer support across all types of issues (e.g. transition, bullying, friendship, mental wellbeing) and across all settings - schools; colleges, and community settings (we will cover online support in a later question).*

*The questions ask in your experience what best practice looks like for good peer support. If possible, please describe how they operate and your views on what their impact has been.*

*Where you have any formally collected evidence (e.g. data, evaluations, research) to support your views we would like to hear about that as well.*

- ***What are your experiences of what best practice in peer support across all types of issues looks like?***

### **Peer support through Girlguiding's structure**

4. Peer support can be a key element of girls' and young women's experience as a Girlguiding member. Girls can build strong peer support relationships, which can include or be separate from friendships, within their unit setting week to week. This setting and Girlguiding's programme supports girls to build resilience and other life skills and offers a safe space for girls to talk about challenges and issues they face.



### Best practice in Peer Education

5. Girlguiding has an established programme of peer education that has been running since 2010. The programme trains 14- to 26-year-olds to offer peer education sessions to their peers in guiding in their local area. There are over 600 peer educators in the network who have delivered sessions to thousands of girls across the UK. They currently deliver age-appropriate sessions on body confidence (Free Being Me), Healthy Relationships and Youth Health.
6. The programme operates as a network across the UK. Leaders can use an online portal to book a peer educator to visit their unit and deliver a session on a topic such as Free Being Me or Think Resilient. A peer education coordinator and a trained peer educator in the local area then arrange with the unit a suitable time to visit and deliver the session. The role of a peer educator is to deliver material and facilitate discussion and engagement between members of the unit about certain topics, which can then lead to peer support relationships.
7. We are growing our peer education network and through the programme in 2015:
  - over 300 new Peer Educators were trained
  - over 1200 Peer Education sessions were delivered
  - over 40,000 girls were reached with 'Free Being Me'.
8. Our peer education programme has been very positively received across the UK with increasing demand. The programme has more Peer Educators than ever before running more sessions. The impact on girls who participate in sessions has been overwhelmingly positive:

*"I used to worry about my appearance, like I thought I was fat but now I feel really confident about myself".* Twelve year old Guide reflecting on her experience of 'Free Being Me' a year after experiencing the programme.

*"It has taught me to be confident in myself so that I can go out and make other girls more confident."* Peer Educator

*"4 (peer education) is fabulous, inspiring, fun, educational and exciting!"*  
Girlguiding Dundee

*"Knowing it has had such a positive impact on young people's lives makes the hard work of running a peer education programme so worthwhile."* Laura Ede, Peer Educator

*"Since visiting the unit I have seen the girls' leader who has said how much the girls enjoyed it and how they have used the phrase 'Body Talk' to each other whilst in the meeting place and at camp to stop others from talking about their bodies negatively which is a huge achievement for these girls!"* Peer Educator after a Free Being Me session at Legra 10th Leigh-On-Sea Rangers
9. From our experience running the programme, we have learnt that best practice includes:
  - Peer Educators receiving quality training about peer education and about each topic separately before they deliver any sessions



- Peer Educators being prepared through training to tackle misconceptions amongst their peers, for example where prejudicial views are shared
  - Peer Educators being aware of their responsibilities when concerns are raised
  - Age appropriate conversations.
- ***How can this best practice be translated into supporting children and young people's mental wellbeing?***
10. Working with youth mental health charity YoungMinds, Girlguiding has developed a new peer education resource called Think Resilient that aims to build mental wellbeing and increase resilience in girls and young women.
  11. Girls' views always inform Girlguiding's programme. Resilience and mental wellbeing was voted the top topic about which girls and young women wanted to see us develop a new peer education resource. Our young members concerns about girls' wellbeing are mirrored by the concern of all girls and young women as reported in our Girls' Attitudes Survey in 2014 and 2015. Peer Educators and Girlguiding volunteers helped to shape the development of the resource.
  12. The best practice we have established through the peer education model will support our young peer educators to effectively deliver Think Resilience to girls and young women across the UK responsibly.
  13. Think Resilient aims to help girls understand the need for and importance of resilience, as well as practise resilience-building techniques and then plan ways to keep growing their own resilience.
  14. The first session is run by the Peer Educator, who introduces four of these techniques to the girls:
    - problem solving and positive thinking
    - self-calming
    - identifying their support networks
    - recognising their skills and achievements
    - understanding their own emotions.
  15. The Think Resilient resource techniques include activities that encourage girls and young women to engage in building their own peer to peer support networks. These activities teach girls to identify those in their support network and who they can offer support to. Once the girls have learnt the techniques they can then use and build on them in the future.

***How could good peer support approaches in community settings be used to support programmes within schools and colleges?***

16. Girlguiding's informal education provision complements what girls and young women learn at school. Young people engaged in peer support or peer education outside of school could network and provide co-support with those engaged in peer support within schools.



17. Girls that take part in Free Being Me are assigned a personal challenge to take what they have learned out into their community. Girls are encouraged to reach out to their friends, families and schools as Free Being Me ambassadors.
  - ***What are your experiences of peer support for young people's mental wellbeing or mental illness (eg. loneliness, depression, eating disorders etc)?***
18. Free Being Me is a body confidence programme for Brownies and Guides. Sessions help girls recognise myths about how girls and women 'should' look and be happy in their own skin. Research by Girlguiding reveals girls feel under intense pressure to look a certain way - which is having a damaging effect on their body confidence, future aspirations and well-being. According to our Girls' Attitudes Survey 2014, almost half of 11- to 21-year-olds sometimes feel ashamed of the way they look.
19. Free Being Me is part of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) and the Dove Self-Esteem Project. It's being used in 146 countries around the world, reaching 3.5 million girls.
20. As part of the resource girls examine the myth of the "perfect-looking woman", exploring why that's a problem and challenging it in themselves and others.
21. Girls also inspire positive self-esteem in others through a Take Action Project following the peer education sessions.
  - ***What in your experience do schools, colleges and community settings need to set up and facilitate peer support (e.g. advice on which models to use, training for young people, an external facilitator etc.)?***
22. Girlguiding has experience of planning and implementing a peer education programme and some elements of our learning may be relevant to schools seeking to implement peer support approaches. We would suggest schools could consider:
  - Practical support for those delivering peer support. Girlguiding Peer Educators receive help from peer education coordinators to link to units, organise sessions and set up sessions.
  - Training for peer supporters. Our approach to training is detailed below.
  - Risk management. Our risk management in the peer education programme includes training on: practical elements, the need to potentially break confidence, concerns and complaints and digital communications.
  - Practice sessions for peer supporters to ensure they are comfortable engaging in peer support. Our peer education model allows girls to practise their session before they deliver it to ensure they are comfortable to do so.
  - Informing parents/guardians. Girlguiding ensures that pre- and post-session communications go to parents/guardians to make them aware of the content and methods associated with the peer education session.

### ***Support, training and accreditation***

*These questions are about your experiences and views of what support and training that peer supporters need to have to be knowledgeable, confident and effective.*



We also want to know if you have any experience of the types of recognition or accreditation that might encourage and reward both the peer supporters and their organisations, and inspire them to take part.

- ***What support or training for peer supporters is needed to make the support effective?***
23. As part of their peer education training, Peer Educators learn to:
- communicate effectively through facilitation and body language training
  - lead group discussions confidently
  - draw out girls' own ideas and thoughts
  - adapt sessions to suit different girls' needs and abilities using a tool known as RECIPES (Rules, Equipment, Changes to speed/force, Instructions, Practice, Environment, Skills)
  - project-manage sessions to make sure the girls have the best experience possible
  - safeguarding training as detailed below
  - They also have lots of time to practice the resource and reflect on what they've learnt.
- ***What recognition is effective in encouraging young people to take part in peer support activity (group or 1:1) and helping them to capitalise on it in the future?***
24. In addition to appealing to young people's interests and passions, young people may also be motivated by:
- Badges/certificates - A physical award gives young people recognition of the time and energy they have invested
  - Knowledge - Young people should finish their training with new practical knowledge and skills they feel will be useful to them in their lives and add to their CVs
  - Social recognition - Activity such as training should offer young people opportunities to network and receive recognition from their peers.
- ***What is effective in encouraging schools, colleges and community settings to offer peer support?***
25. Girlguiding encourages its Leaders to invite Peer Educators into their units by effectively communicating the benefits of peer education to them and letting them know why it is so important, using the girls' voices as evidence.
26. The Peer Educators themselves are also encouraged, with the help from their local peer education coordinator, to promote the work they are doing in their local community, talking directly to unit Leaders and addressing any questions or concerns they may have.
- ***What information or support do you think children and young people need before they start receiving peer support, or while they are having peer support?***



27. Girlguiding encourages Peer Educators to share a copy of the activities they are planning to do with the unit so that the Leader can understand what's happening during the sessions.
28. At the start of the session Peer Educators tell the girls about the Safe Space they are in - a place set aside in the meeting room where the girls can go if they need to take a break - and what to do if they need a break.
29. Peer educators also lead the unit in a 'group guidelines' activity so that all girls understand what is expected of them during the session, for example listening to one another and the Peer Educator, keeping the conversation confidential and avoiding making assumptions about other people.

### **Online peer support options**

*These questions are about the increasing number of peer support online and mobile apps that children and young people are accessing for help.*

- ***What do you think the important features are of effective online support models for mental wellbeing?***  
n/a
- ***How do you think online support could be used effectively by schools, colleges and community settings?***  
n/a
- ***What information and/or reassurance would you need to feel confident recommending particular online peer support apps to young people?***  
n/a

### **Linking with specialist services**

*Peer support is not a replacement for support from adults or specialist support from mental health professionals, but it should be able to signpost those who need it to the appropriate services.*

*These questions are about how peer support models can fit with, or link to, wider mental health support systems.*

- ***What are your experiences, including any evidence that you can share, about how peer support can fit within the wider continuum of mental health support?***  
n/a
  - ***How can good peer support models ensure appropriate referrals and a swift response to professional help when needed to prevent escalation and crisis of a mental health issue? Please give examples if possible.***
30. It is not the Peer Educators' role to try to deal with any safeguarding issues. Adults hold responsibility for escalating and it is important that there is a clear





demarcation of rules between the peer supporter and the responsible adult. Girls are encouraged to be a supportive and active listener, but then immediately tell the Leader, who will take it forward from there.

### **Risks**

*We want to know more about what you think the possible risks might be in providing peer support for young people's mental health, both for those offering and those receiving the support.*

- ***What are your experiences, including any evidence that you can share, about the risks of providing peer support, either through face-to-face or online support?***

31. Girlguiding has safeguarding policies which all our volunteers and Peer Educators are made aware of and have access to. If faced with a member that has a concern, a Peer Educator should follow this guidance:

*You are not responsible for the safeguarding of any of the girls in the units you visit. Sometimes, a participant might see you as a safe person to talk to about the challenges they face in their lives. If anything like this happens, be a supportive and active listener, but then immediately tell the Leader, who should take it forward from there. You can get support from your 4 Coordinator after the session.*

*During a session, you should set aside a space in the meeting room where the girls can go if they need to take a break or step out of an activity. This is the 'Safe Space'. If a participant moves to this place, a member of the unit Leadership team should go and make sure the participant is ok while you deliver the rest of the session.*

*With topics like mental wellbeing, you might come across discussions about negative 'coping' techniques. If you're concerned about any comments made during the session, please tell the Leader.*

32. The risks of peer education that Girlguiding has identified through planning and feedback of peer education sessions, which may also relate to peer to peer support include:

- a risk of disclosure
- over attachment forming between peers
- the formation of inappropriate relationships
- the possibility of exploiting the power dynamics that can be created in these relationships
- a lack of oversight.

33. Through training, peer educators are made aware of these risks and supported to feel confident to mitigate these and understand how to escalate any issues that arise.

- ***Do you have any further comments or views that you would like to share with us?***



34. The Girls' Attitudes Survey canvasses the opinions of over 1,500 girls and young women aged 7 to 21, inside and outside guiding across the UK each year. We commission expert child research agency Childwise to conduct this survey. For more information and data see [www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes](http://www.girlguiding.org.uk/girlsattitudes)

35. Key statistics from the 2015 Girls' Attitudes Survey:

- 37% of girls and young women aged 11 to 21 say they have personally needed help with their mental health
- 62% of girls aged 11 to 21 say that a girl or young woman they know has experienced a mental health problem - Among those aged 17 to 21 it is 46%
- 82% of girls aged 11 to 21 feel that adults don't often recognise the pressure that young people are under
- 44% of girls aged 11 to 16 say that they have talked about mental health during lessons at school
- 57% of girls aged 11 to 21 say that mental health is awkward to talk about - 66% of 17- to 21-year-olds say this
- 53% of girls aged 11 to 21 say they don't know enough about mental health problems among young people
- 52% of girls aged 11 to 21 say that they would like to know more about where to get help and support for mental health issues.