S2S Peer Support Handbook

2026/27

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

S2S
Student 2 Student

Welcome Message

Breda Walls

Breda

Breda Walls
Director of Student Services

Welcome to the S2S Peer Support team!

“Thrive”, Trinity’s Strategic Plan 2025–2030, is committed to ensuring every student is supported throughout their journey at Trinity. As a Peer Supporter, you play an important role in bringing that commitment to life.

Sometimes, the first person a student feels comfortable reaching out to is another student. By offering confidential, one-to-one support, you create a safe, welcoming space where students can talk openly about whatever is on their mind. Your role is not to solve problems or give advice, but to listen with empathy, compassion, and without judgement. That simple act of being present can make an extraordinary difference to someone who needs to feel heard.

The training you’ve completed has equipped you with the skills to support others thoughtfully and responsibly, and your willingness to do this is something to be truly proud of. Every conversation you have contributes to a kinder, more connected Trinity community.

As you support others, remember to take care of yourselves too. You are part of a team, and you are never expected to carry things alone. Lean on one another, and never hesitate to reach out to Ralph, Shauna, or Maryna whenever you need guidance or support. Looking after yourselves is an important part of looking after others.

Thank you for your commitment to your fellow students. The time you give and the care you show will have a lasting impact, often in ways you may never fully realise. We are so grateful to have you as part of the S2S Peer Support team.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go leir, a thousand thanks to you all!

Breda

Welcome Message

Trish Murphy

Trish Murphy
Student Counselling Service Director

Welcome to the S2S Peer Support handbook.

This programme is an essential part of the overall Student Counselling offering, and you are a crucial part of our stepped-care model.

Students will benefit from your presence, listening ear, and focused attention that can be availed of for as long as required. This allows students to select the support that suits them, when they need it and in a place that works for them – this is unique and acts as a wonderful addition to the supports students can avail of.

The Peer Support programme is a leader in Ireland, and we are very proud of its existence and development. The whole team in Student Counselling is grateful for your involvement and for the important role you play in the college's approach to student mental health.

We salute you!

SCS Student Counselling Services

SLD Student Learning Development

S2S Student 2 Student

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Introducing S2S

Trinity College's Student 2 Student (S2S) Mentoring and Peer Support Programme is part of our Student Counselling Service, and specifically designed to ensure every student in Trinity knows that they belong here.

Through S2S, students can get information and support from another student, find a friendly face to have a chat, talk things through or just ask a few questions when they're not sure who to approach.

Honey Morris
2024/25
Peer Supporter

'S2S is such a wholesome and beautiful organisation. Everyone is met with open arms, acceptance, and encouragement. Not only are you allowed to be yourself, you're encouraged to. This community quickly became my home away from home, and it is something I will forever be grateful for.'

S2S recognises that student success is founded on belonging and connection, and strives to create a social and supportive environment where everyone can be their authentic self, and is welcomed and accepted as they are.

Volunteers are fundamental to S2S – we wouldn't exist without you! Training with S2S is a fantastic opportunity to develop your skills and help other students with the transition to college, or with 1:1 support when needed.

S2S is based in House 47, which includes a bookable student space (including a microwave, tea & coffee and an interactive screen), a Zoom Room for online appointments and a 1:1 room. Feel free to drop by, heat up some lunch, and enjoy the S2S vibes!

The S2S staff have a combined experience of over twenty five years in volunteer training, peer engagement, community development and active listening and support work. Along with Student Counselling and Student Learning Development, S2S collaborates closely with the Transition to Trinity Officer, the Senior Tutor's Office and the Students' Union to enhance Trinity's student experience and to develop an inclusive campus community.

Introducing S2S

Vision, Mission, and Values

Trinity Counselling, Learning Development and Student 2 Student Services

Our Vision:

To elevate student belonging, mental health and academic confidence, recognising these as the foundations of student success. Our team of psychologists, psychotherapists, learning developers, peer support and administrative professionals work in partnership with students - blending expertise with lived experience to create spaces of empathy, growth, healing, and learning.

We are committed to a culture of unconditional welcome and respect, where students, staff, and trainees learn from one another, drive positive change, and build the skills to flourish in their studies and in their lives.

Our Mission:

Support through collaboration, connection and compassion.

Accountable Space Agreement

These **commitments** guide how we **learn**, **support**, and **grow** as an **S2S community**.

We create spaces where everyone belongs

S2S is a **friendly, welcoming,** and **supportive community**. We **respect** each person's **identity**, **lived experience, language, culture, beliefs, accessibility needs,** and preferred ways of participating. We strive to create an environment where people feel **safe to ask questions**, **admit mistakes**, **change their minds**, and **contribute without fear** of ridicule or embarrassment.

We value **authentic connection** and **respectful curiosity**. We welcome different perspectives while standing **firmly against discrimination,** harassment, and hate speech and we **advocate for equity**-deserving communities.

We listen with respect and engage with care

We will be **present**, **engaged**, and **mindful** of distractions so **everyone feels listened to** and valued. We encourage **participation without pressure**, recognising that respectful disagreement and constructive feedback **help us learn from one another.**

We use **"I" statements**, practise **active listening**, **avoid assumptions**, **respect** each person's **autonomy**, and take a **person-centred, non-judgemental** approach in all interactions. We treat personal stories shared within the group as **confidential**, except where there is a concern about someone's safety or wellbeing that requires us to seek appropriate support.

We communicate openly and take responsibility for our impact

We encourage **calm**, **considerate discussion** where **everyone can speak**, **question**, and **be heard**. We recognise that **intent does not erase impact**, and we communicate with **kindness**, **empathy**, and **openness**.

When we make mistakes, we **acknowledge** them, **apologise** where appropriate, **learn** from them, and work together to **repair relationships rather than assign blame**. We are also **mindful** of how much space we take up, **stepping forward** to contribute and **stepping back** to ensure others can do the same.

We respect boundaries and grow together

We **embrace discomfort** as an **opportunity for learning** while **respecting** our own **boundaries** and those of our roles. We practise **self-care**, **reflect** on our experiences, **celebrate** one another's contributions, take **responsibility** for our actions, and continue **learning together**.

We build meaningful connections

Alongside supporting one another, we recognise that **enjoyment**, **laughter**, and **genuine human connection** are essential to building a **welcoming**, **inclusive**, and **supportive S2S community.**

S2S
Student 2 Student

Policies

Overview

As a member of S2S, there are certain policies that you must be aware of to ensure your safety and the safety of the mentees.

We value you, our volunteers, and want you to get involved at all levels of the organisation. We aim to train, support and supervise to the best of our abilities, and to act quickly and fairly if difficulties arise, and we are proud to uphold the **TCD Volunteer Charter** and the **Volunteering Ireland Charter**.

By volunteering with S2S, you agree to uphold our data protection and confidentiality agreements.

You must familiarise yourself with the **S2S Volunteer Policy Document**, including some key policies such as:

- **S2S Diversity and Accountability Policy**
- **S2S Event Funding Policy**
- **S2S Room Booking Policy**

As a student of Trinity, you are also expected to uphold **college policies**, of note:

- **Dignity and Respect Policy**
- **Equality Policy**
- **Accessible Information Policy**

Policies

Data Protection

As S2S volunteers, you are required to adhere to the **Student Counselling Service's Privacy Notice** and to be mindful of how and why you process personal data.

Personal data you are likely to encounter as an S2S Peer Supporter includes:

- Students' contact details (TCD email addresses).
- Emails written to you by other students, often including very sensitive personal data.
- Emails from staff outlining information shared by students in their Peer Support requests.

To ensure that everyone's data and their privacy is respected, you must:

- Delete emails (received and sent) once you have dealt with them. If emails contain personal/ sensitive data that may be needed in the future, please consult with the S2S office about secure storage on the SCS Titanium system.
- Avoid taking any notes during or after meetups. If you need to take a memo of a follow-up task or agreed next action, do it without anything that could identify the student concerned.
- Avoid addressing situations or issues over email - keep your written interactions brief, and encourage exploration when you're face to face and can talk openly. Never use names of 3rd parties etc. in written communication.

Please refer to **Trinity College's Data Protection Handbook** for more detailed information.

Policies

Confidentiality

As part of volunteering with S2S, it is important that you follow the **S2S confidentiality policy**.

The relationship between a student and an S2S Peer Supporter is confidential to the service. This means that nothing a student tells you can be disclosed to anyone outside the Counselling Services. There are exceptions to this, including:

1. If you are concerned about the **risk of harm to a student or to a third party.** In these circumstances, you must raise your concerns with staff in the S2S office as a priority (following the referral process wherever possible). S2S will make every effort to discuss the situation directly with the student(s) concerned and to involve them in the disclosure process.

2. S2S staff form part of the Student Counselling Service (SCS), who are mandated reporters under The Children First Act 2015. Information regarding **past or current abuse of children (aged under 18)** given to SCS must be reported to the Irish Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) if there is a reasonable suspicion that there is a child (aged under 18) at risk at the time of reporting. Records relating to such matters will be kept in accordance with current legal guidelines.

3. Case notes kept by S2S staff relating to student engagement with an S2S volunteer may be **subpoenaed by court order.** This, along with GDPR, is a good reason not to keep notes unless absolutely necessary for the student's wellbeing.

S2S Staff

Ralph Armstrong-Astley

S2S Coordinator
Pronouns: She/Her

Ralph leads the S2S team and is responsible for the strategic development of the service. As part of the Student Counselling Service Management team, she represents S2S volunteers and the students they support in steering and advisory groups across Trinity College, and within the National Consortium for Peer-led Transition.

Shauna O'Connor

S2S Programme Officer
Pronouns: She/Her

Shauna manages the daily function of the S2S volunteer programmes and volunteer engagement. She provides students support and debriefing to S2S volunteers. She also assists in the strategic development and representation of the service.

TBC

S2S Executive Officer

The EO assists with the administrative work of the programme and the daily function of the S2S Student Space in House 47. She manages student and volunteer queries, volunteer event funding, and assists with the orientation process.

Here to Support You

Email: student2student@tcd.ie

Phone: 01 896 5033

Ralph's mobile: 085 7833 548

Address: House 47, Trinity College Dublin

- **TCD Sense Map**
- **Google Maps**

Book a **drop-in session** with an S2S Staff Member.

In an emergency, please use the **after hours services information.**

House 47
Student Space

You can find us here: House 47, Trinity College Dublin

- **TCD Sense Map**
- **Google Maps**

S2S is based in House 47, where there is a dedicated student space for you to enjoy! It is equipped with a microwave, cutlery and tea and coffee facilities. You can use this space to host a meetup, have lunch, or just hang out. We also have an interactive screen so you can practice presentations or stream movies too. Something you'd like to see in the space? Let us know!

Along with the communal space, there is a bookable Zoom Room and a Private 1:1 space. If you have an online appointment, need to study or want to have a private conversation with someone, you can book these spaces!

Booking Links:
The Zoom Room (Room 7)
The 1:1 Room (Room 8)
Student Space (for group meet-ups)

Please see the **S2S Room Booking Policy.**

Role Overview

A Peer Supporter is a volunteer available throughout the year to meet with students one-to-one as requested. You must be willing to listen confidentially and without judgement to any student who requests support. Having your own experience of significant difficulties in no way stops you from being a Peer Supporter, so long as you are currently in a safe and resilient place.

What is involved?

Peer Supporters must be available for an intensive 35 hr in-person training.

Once trained, Peer Supporters must be available via email to take requests and to arrange in-person meetups with students.

They must also attend:

- Refresher training every term (approx. 3 hours)
- Monthly group supervisions with Student Counselling
- Regular debriefing with S2S staff

Peer Supporters may also be requested to:

- Provide emergency accompaniment to students referred to A&E.
- Participate in programme strategy meetings.
- Participate in service promotion activities.

What do you get?

- Extensive training in support work, active listening, challenging personal values, exploration skills, referral, managing significant distress and self-care.
- Substantial student and staff support frameworks.
- The opportunity to do something positive and rewarding.
- Guaranteed references based on involvement.
- Strong social network within S2S Society.

What is expected?

- Attend a full week of in-person training.
- Undergo Garda Vetting.
- Be available to take casework as of September 2026.
- To regularly check and respond to your TCD emails.
- Attend regular debrief sessions with S2S staff.
- Attend monthly group supervision with SCS staff.

Other S2S Volunteer Roles

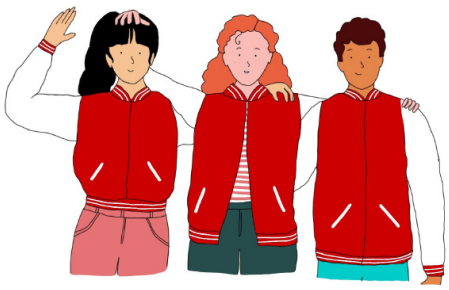
Mentors

An S2S Mentor is a student volunteer who provides guidance and support to a group of incoming first-year students. Mentors are often among the first to welcome first-years to campus, helping them feel included and providing a sense of belonging. You can spot them buzzing around campus in their red hoodies.

Head Mentors

Head Mentors support and guide Mentors to perform their role to the best of their ability. They help find answers to questions about mentoring, organising events, signposting, and much more. Mentors can turn to their Head Mentor for advice and support whenever they need. Head Mentors also organise events for both Mentors and mentees, strengthening the S2S community.

Head Mentors meet with the S2S office monthly to share updates, upcoming events, or any concerns regarding the S2S programme. They encourage Mentors to progress in their roles and nominate outstanding Mentors for S2S Awards at the end of the academic year.



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What is Peer Support?

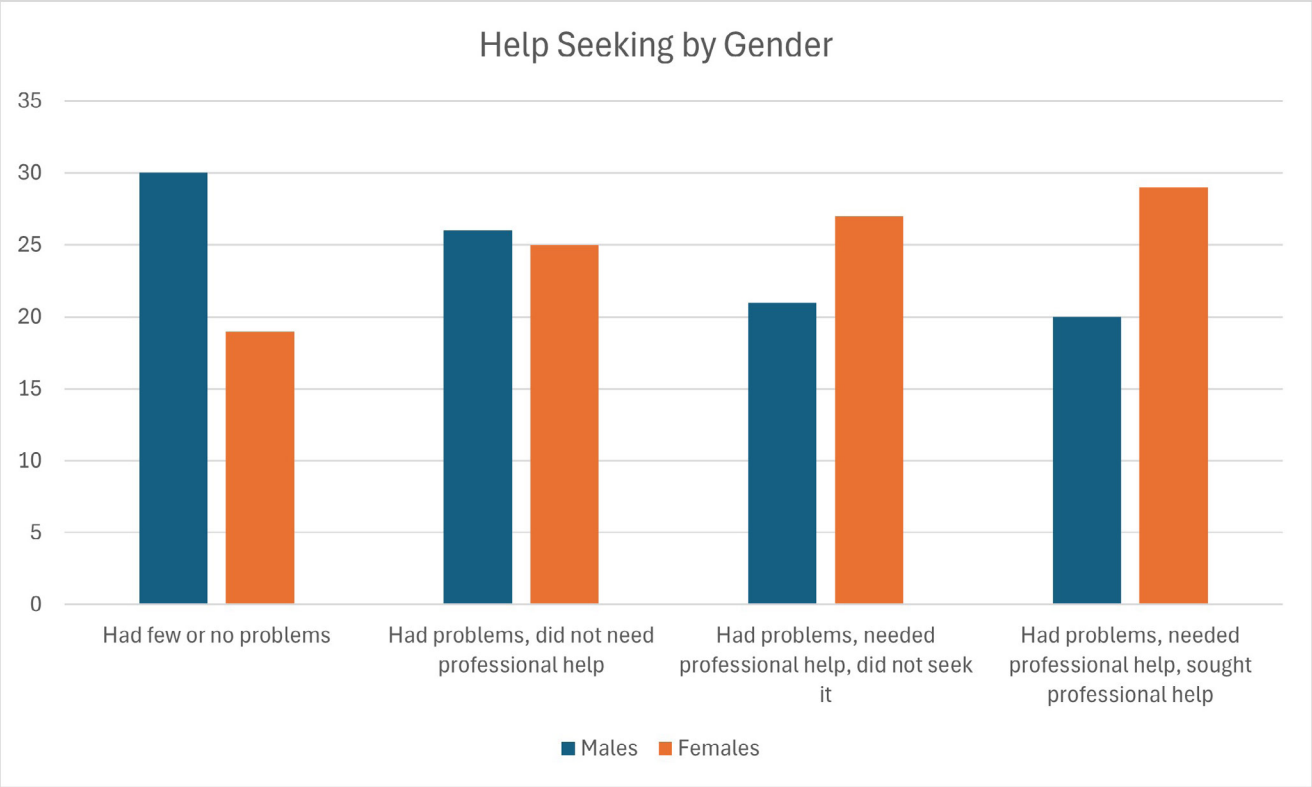
Peer Support is grounded in mutuality: drawing on lived experience to help people in similar circumstances and/or facing similar challenges. A Peer Supporter should be relatable enough that those seeking a listening ear don't feel intimidated or inferior.

Your S2S Peer Support training is not intended to qualify you as a counsellor or professional expert. It's designed to help you listen and understand the issues people bring to you, while giving you the space to offer compassion without it negatively impacting you.

Ultimately, the S2S programme is designed to provide accessible support to students in need. It also aims to help you develop your own resilience strategies and support mechanisms, which you can share with fellow students as you learn and grow.

Why Peer Support Matters

Peer Support plays a vital role in helping young adults feel comfortable talking about what they're going through. The Help-Seeking by Gender graph from the **My World Survey 2** report (Figure 5.13, page 83) shows that many young people in Ireland struggle to seek professional help when they need it.



- Males (30%) were much more likely than females (19%) to report that they had few or no problems.
- Females (27%) were more likely to report that they had problems and did not seek help even though they needed it, compared to males (21%).
- Females (29%) were also more likely to report that they had sought professional help for their problems than males (20%).
- **Note:** Less than 1% of respondents identified as non-binary/other/prefer not to say.
- It's also worth noting that, according to the section on preferred sources of support (Figure 5.13, page 81), 33% of young adults said they would most likely seek help online.

Core Conditions

There are three core conditions of effective peer support: acceptance, genuineness, and empathy. These conditions encourage a sense of equality and co-operation; we all feel more comfortable approaching someone with our difficulties when we see them as equals.

The ability to listen is probably the most valuable communication skill. People often just need somebody to listen and hear them during a period of struggle.

Active listening involves the ability to take in the whole message, accepting what is said without judging, and understanding not only the words spoken, but also the feelings that underlie the words. Everyone can listen, but cultivating active listening skills is a life-long endeavour.

Acceptance:

When helping others, demonstrate that you accept and respect them for who and what they are. This helps them to feel safe to share and explore problems without the threat of embarrassment or ridicule.

Genuineness:

To help others effectively, it's essential to be genuine as a person and Peer Supporter. Being "real" builds a foundation of trust for the helping relationship.

Empathy:

People often confuse empathy with sympathy. If you sympathise with someone you think of how you would feel in their situation. If you empathise with them, you understand how it feels for them.

The Ideal Helper

There is no formula as to what makes the ideal helper. Helping others comes from a place of compassion and nurture.

Let's do an exercise and think about a person who you have reached out to for support. When you have that person in mind, answer these questions:

- What was it about them that made you choose to reach out?
- What specific aspects of their personality or behaviour did you find helpful?
- What did they say or do which may have helped you relax and encouraged you to confide in them?

Once you've answered all three questions, take note of your responses and see if you use any of the same in your behaviour towards others.

Yukta Kanoria
2024/25
Peer Supporter

'Be yourself. People value authenticity more than you know and the role doesn't require to become someone you're not. You don't have to know everything else and try to solve people's problems. Being there and listening to them is all they need and it truly makes a HUGE difference.'

Valuing Diversity

The world is full of people with different beliefs, views, and values. They come from different backgrounds, places and speak different languages. They may follow different religions and have different sexualities and/or gender expressions. This means we are almost guaranteed to be confronted with feelings and beliefs that oppose our own.

Becoming aware of our own thoughts and feelings is the first step in the process of becoming an effective Peer Supporter.
It is important to examine the prejudices present in our society, college community, and ourselves. Unfortunately, personal biases can and often do influence our actions, and we may be unaware of how they affect our interactions with others.

As Irish third-level institutions become more diverse, it is helpful to consider how the college experience varies from student to student. For example, while minority college members have similar needs to those of other students, many of them may face additional hurdles.

It is important to suspend our personal worldview to remain objective and non-judgemental in the Peer Support space. This allows us to gain an understanding of the other person's position without letting our beliefs or biases interfere.

Reflect and consider the following:

- What would you find difficult to hear from a peer?
- What would prevent you from remaining impartial?
- How do beliefs and values differ from prejudices?

Labelling and Stigma Reduction

The Social Theory Behind Labelling and Stigma

Stigma isn't just a result of personal bias; it's shaped by broader cultural norms, social structures, and power dynamics. Labelling theory, developed by sociologist Howard Becker, suggests that people are seen as "deviant" not necessarily because of what they do, but because of how others react.

In mental health, these labels often contribute to different kinds of stigma:

- Public stigma (from society),
- Structural stigma (embedded in policies and systems),
- Self-stigma (when people internalise negative beliefs about themselves).

Five Practical Steps to Reducing Mental Health Stigma

These steps are adapted from the CHOC Children's Mental Health Education materials (CHOC, 2021). They are used here to support Peer Supporters in creating open, respectful, and stigma-aware environments.

- **Perspective**
  Ask "How are you?" instead of "What's wrong?"
  Be curious about someone's experience, not their diagnosis.
- **Choose Words Carefully**
  Language matters. Even with good intentions, words can have an unintended impact.
- **Use People-First Language**
  Say "a person with depression" rather than "a depressed person."
  Let the person lead how they talk about their experience.
- **Keep Learning**
  Stigma reduction is ongoing. Stay open to learning about different experiences and identities.
- **Lead with Compassion and Dignity**
  Be kind, respectful, and inclusive. Being an ally starts with empathy.

Difference of Opinion and Confirmation Bias

We often assume that open debate will lead to the best ideas or the right answer. But that's not always the case. Sometimes, strong opinions can shut down conversation instead of opening it up.

Confirmation bias is when we naturally seek out information that supports what we already believe and ignore or dismiss anything that doesn't. This can make it harder to understand other perspectives or learn something new.

The video below, by Tim Minchin, explores how confirmation bias affects the way we process information, how it can limit critical thinking. Being open to opposing views is so important in forming well-rounded opinions and to making meaningful connection .

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Case Allocation

Peer Support requests are submitted through an online form. Once a request comes in, the S2S Programme Officer will allocate the case on the following criteria (in this order):

1. Suitability based on specific requests made by the student (e.g., gender identity, course)
2. Availability of the Peer Supporter
3. Peer Supporter's workload to date – to ensure equity, a Peer Supporter who has handled fewer cases in the relevant academic year will be prioritised.

If a student requests a specific Peer Supporter, they will be contacted. Otherwise, the request will be sent to the group of Peer Supporters, and the Programme Officer will assign the case based on who responds. The selected Peer Supporter will be contacted by email. It is entirely up to the Peer Supporter to decide whether to accept the case, and it is absolutely fine to decline.

Where possible, a Peer Supporter will be assigned to a case within two working days of the request. The Peer Supporter should then contact the student within 48 hours of the assignment. If you don't hear back in a week, send another email. If you still hear nothing, send a final email but mention you'll close the case if you don't hear back. All **meetings** must be held in a public space and scheduled between 10 am and 5 pm, Monday - Friday, to allow for referrals or immediate debriefing.

Remember! Once you have a case, email the S2S Office with the details of your meetup and any updates. Please don't make us chase you!

All Peer Supporters must attend a **debrief** with the S2S Coordinator or Programme Officer after each initial meeting. As cases progress, a debrief may not always be necessary, depending on what was discussed. However, the first meeting with any student must always be followed by a debrief.

Emails

Writing a good email is about clarity, tone, and timing. Here are some tips to keep your messages thoughtful and effective:

- Subject line - think of a way of making sure the student knows it's not SPAM without anyone over their shoulder knowing they're accessing Peer Support. Consider coding it "PS Meetup" or saying "S2S Get Together" instead.
- Be yourself — don't rely on generic templates.
- Offer 2-3 options for days/times to meet, to avoid overwhelming the reader
- If there's no reply after a week, follow up
- Don't reply to support cases too quickly — it can set unrealistic expectations
- Office-related replies can be as swift as you like
- Manage up — Keep S2S staff in the loop when needed!

Meeting Out of Hours

Wherever possible, Peer Supporters are asked to keep their meetups with students between the hours of 9am-5pm, Monday-Friday. This is to ensure that staff are available should the Peer Supporter need to make an immediate and/or urgent referral to professional care.

In some cases, this restriction on hours makes it impossible for students in need, or for volunteers themselves, to participate in the Peer Support programme. In these instances, the following protocol has been designed to ensure the safety of all students (service users and volunteers alike).

Step1

Try and make the first appointment during office hours.

Even if regular meetups between 9-5, Monday-Friday are not going to work, can an exception be made for the first meetup? This will provide an extra level of support while you get a sense of the student's needs, and how comfortable you would be supporting the student when staff are not immediately available.

Step 2

Meetup when S2S staff are onsite whenever you can.

The S2S co-ordinator is normally in House 47 until 6 pm every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evening. If meetups can be arranged so that they finish at or before 6 pm, please check to see if House 47 will be open until 6 pm, and that a staff member will be available in case of difficulties. **This must be arranged with S2S staff before agreeing the meetup with the student.**

Step 3

Ask S2S Staff to make arrangements for you in SCS.

If meetups need to happen after 6 pm, talk to an S2S staff member about making arrangements for you to book a room in SCS, 3rd Floor, 7-9 Leinster St South. During term time, there is an evening service running there until 8 pm on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

In each of the above scenarios, your initial point of contact will be staff in the S2S Team, so it is essential that they know when out of hours meetups are taking place.

If your meetup is taking place in House 47 up to 6 pm, please check in with the S2S staff member onsite to let them know everything is OK before you leave.

If your meetup is taking place in Leinster Street South, you will be told which S2S staff member to check-in with. It is **essential** that you send them a message to let them know that everything is OK before you leave the service.

If you do have any concerns for the student you are meeting, please liaise with the S2S staff onsite or over the phone to discuss your concerns as soon as possible.

S2S staff will consult with the SCS Director or their nominee as necessary, and the SCS Out of Hours protocol for clinical staff will be implemented if a student is deemed to be at risk for any reason.

A&E Accompaniment

From time to time a TCD staff member may refer a student to A&E and you may be asked to accompany them with a fellow Peer Supporter. You are never expected to provide accompaniment without prior consultation with a member of S2S/SCS, and you will never be asked to do this alone.
Your support will be requested when it is helpful for the student to have calm, supportive company from a peer. They may not wish to talk about the situation and are more likely to appreciate day to day conversation or amicable silence. The student you are accompanying may be in a vulnerable state, so please remember that any sense of panic or urgency is not helpful.

A&E accompaniment should only be provided upon request from a member of S2S/SCS staff. Concerns that a student outside of the S2S/SCS service may need hospital consultation should be raised with S2S/SCS or the College Health Centre immediately.

Accompaniment process:

- Arrangements will already have been made with the hospital, and you will be given a **referral letter** to present at reception when you get there. Transport will also be arranged for you and the student.
- A member of S2S/SCS will be available to **discuss the situation** and to answer any questions you have before you leave.
- Exchange your **contact details** with the TCD staff member who has requested your support and keep them up to date where possible. You can also call/text them if there is anything you are unsure of, or if you need further help at any point.
- You will either be asked to wait until relief arrives (e.g. friend or relative comes to take over) or to hand over the care of the student to the hospital as soon as they reach triage. If the latter is the case, it will be stated in the referral letter that the hospital is responsible for the students care, and that you need to leave.
- **Please note:** International students may be asked to pay a fee in excess of the €100 A&E fee. If they are resident in Ireland (i.e. living here for more than one year, or intending to live here for more than one year) they should state expressly that they are "ordinarily resident in Ireland", in which case they should not have to pay the excess fee.
- There may be a significant **waiting period** at A&E. Please don't agree to accompany a student unless you are sure that you have the time to do it. Most A&E referrals take place towards the end of the working day (between 4-5 pm).

Before you accept an accompaniment check:

- Are you free for the whole time required? If not, don't go.
- Have you eaten? If not, eat something or grab food for later.
- Is your phone battery low? If it is, can you grab a charger or provide an alternative contact number?
- Do you have the headspace to do an accompaniment.
- Have you done an accompaniment recently? If yes, take a break.

Before you leave:

- Do you have the TCD staff member's phone number?
- Have you got all the information you need? (If not, ask!)
- Do you know when you should leave / go home?
- Does the student have a charged phone? (If not ask a staff member for a charger)
- Have you arranged a date and time for a debrief?

When it's time to go:

Transportation to the hospital will be arranged by SCS using Free Now. Once your accompaniment has been completed, please contact the S2S Co-ordinator and request a taxi back to campus, or to your preferred location. Make sure to send the S2S Co-ordinator a pin of your location so that they can direct the taxi to you. Most hospitals have multiple entry and exit points, so this is essential to ensure you get picked up in a timely manner!

After an accompaniment:

- Have a self-care plan ready, watch a movie, decompress, etc.
- Schedule a debrief with an S2S Staff Member.

Navigating the 1:1

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Planning the Meet-Up

After you have been **assigned a case**, it's time to plan the meet-up!

When:

Make sure to plan meetups during standard working hours (10 am-5 pm Monday to Friday), or to follow the Out of Hours Protocol, in case you need to make a referral.

Where:

Where you meet with your student is entirely up to you. Some people prefer to go for a walk, while others enjoy a more private space. One thing to keep in mind: all meetups should be in person, not online, no matter how many times they ask!

S2S provides a private space that you can book. You can use it to meet with your student or for yourself if you need a quiet space.

What Next:

- Let the S2S Programme Officer know the details of the scheduled meet-up.
- After the meet-up, schedule a **debrief** (unless you've agreed a number of sessions between debriefs).

Disclosures

Sometimes students may share private details of a traumatic experience with you. It is a privilege to have such information shared, and it should be handled with the utmost respect and delicacy. It can also be a difficult thing to hear, so it's essential that you have supports in place for yourself too.

Handling disclosures:

- Listen carefully. Your support and encouragement are important.
- Make sure the student feels heard and believed, just as you would for every student you meet. Your approach doesn't need to change when someone shares something significant or challenging.
- Know your limits and boundaries. There are some situations you cannot (and should not) handle on your own. When in doubt, refer peers to more qualified supports. You can always go with them and support them throug the process of seeking more help.
- Seek consultation. Because Peer Support is confidentaial to the service, you can always discuss what you're told in debrief sessions. You could also let the student know that you would like to talk to someone with a bit more experience/level of professional responsibility if you feel it would be helpful for them to know that you're bringing somenone else in. You can discuss this in debrief if you're not sure what the best approach is.
- Reassure the student that you will maintain confidentiality unless you feel there is a significant or imminent risk to themselves or another individual.
- Continue to follow up with the student, if appropriate. Make sure they know that you are available for them, and you will support them as they work through what is going on.
- Make sure you get a debrief as soon as possible, even if you think you're OK. If nothing is available on the booking calendar, email or drop-in to House 47 and ask for a priority debrief. Be honest about how quickly you need one, even if staff seem busy. You're more important!

Suicidality/Risk of Harm

Signs to look out for:

- Change in appearance
- Social withdrawal
- Concern from classmates
- Direct disclosure of suicide ideation
- Distressing social media posts
- Low mood
- Tearfulness

What do I need to do next?

- Most signs could just as easily reflect exam stress, but you can't know that for certain without direct questions.
- That's why it's important to ask directly about suicide if you're concerned someone is having suicidal thoughts. You won't put the idea in their head, but you might give them the chance to open up.

If you are concerned but can't ask, or if they try to reassure you and you're not convinced, or if they disclose something:

- Bring them to Student Counselling Service (SCS) if possible.
- If not, tell someone in S2S or SCS who you're concerned about and why.
- Always let S2S know, even if you've already brought them to SCS.
- Book a debrief as soon as you can.

Suicidality/Risk of Harm

If a peer says to you that they are distressed, very depressed or indicates that they are having suicidal thoughts and feelings, the following is a recommended action plan for you.

Be kind, empathetic and calm. Ask who else knows about their feelings (i.e. friends, family, GP, counsellor).

If they tell you they are attending their GP or counsellor:

- Ask if the GP or counsellor is aware of the extent of their distress. Also, ask when their next appointment is.
- See if they will make an earlier appointment (i.e. immediately).
- Ask if they would like you to help them organise the appointment (people experiencing depression often find it difficult to energise themselves to do this on their own).

If they tell you that they are not seeing a GP or counsellor or that nobody else knows about their feelings:

- Ask them if they will go and see a GP or counsellor.
- If they agree, organise this with them – help them make an appointment.
- If they do not wish to speak with a professional and you continue to be concerned about their safety, tell them you will have to speak to someone on their behalf. Then contact the S2S Co-ordinator.

As this process could be upsetting for you, feel free to consult with the **Student Counselling Service** or the **S2S Co-ordinator** if you have any concerns about what is best to do. We will support you and help you to clarify the best course of action. Please remember you should not hold serious anxieties about someone else on your own. You need to feel confident that you have done all that you can do to make sure that the distressed person is safe. Sometimes this can be difficult, especially if a distressed person asks you not to tell anyone and feels betrayed.

Managing No-Shows

It can be disappointing when someone misses a meeting, especially your first. Try not to assume the worst. People miss meetings for many reasons, including but not limited to nerves, a busy schedule, unexpected events, or forgetfulness.

Ideally, they will let you know in advance, but that's not always the case. If someone fails to attend a meeting and doesn't make any contact to explain their reasons, take the following steps:

- Notify the S2S office
- Name any concerns (i.e. if you've been concerned about them, or if it's very out of character)
- Send a follow-up email

Note: We also request that you let the S2S office know if your case is coming to an end, and/or you're being "ghosted" by your case.

Curbing Over-Dependency

Sometimes students can become overly reliant on their Peer Supporter, especially if they're struggling to form connections independently. While it's important to be approachable and supportive, part of the role is to encourage independence and help students build confidence in navigating their own way.

Here are some top tips for curbing over-dependency:

- Plan something immediately after your first meetup, ideally a check-in with S2S, so the conversation has a clear endpoint
- Use your wrap-up skills to signal when the meeting is over
- Maintain professional boundaries. This means no exchange of phone numbers or social media handles
- Avoid sending follow-up emails too quickly, as this can create unrealistic expectations

Note: If you are worried that a student is becoming overly dependent, contact S2S staff ASAP.

Signposting

Signposting involves sharing information about a relevant service, that you think is beneficial for a student. Ideally, you would only do this after hearing the studnet out, and you'd give them options to pick from rather than pinning everything on one service.

By using active listening skills, you can make sure a student feels heard, and help figure out which services might be best suited to their needs in addition to peer support. If the time is right to signpost, here are some useful resources:

Health and Wellbeing

Chaplaincy

College Health

Dignity, Respect and Consent Advisors

DisAbility Service

Healthy Trinity

Niteline

Student Counselling Service

S2S Peer Support

TCDSU Welfare & Equality Officer

Financial

Senior Tutor Financial Assistance

Accommodation

TCD Accommodation Office

TCDSU Accommodation Advisory Service

International Students

The Global Room

Academic

Academic Registry

Library

Student Learning Development (SLD)

TCDSU Education Officer

Your Tutor

Careers

Careers Service

IT Support

IT Services

Microsoft Apps (Office 365)

Student Parents

Breastfeeding rooms and supports

Trinity Day Nursery

Mature Students

The Mature Students' Officer

Referrals

You may occasionally come across situations when it is inappropriate for you to get involved, when the case is too close to your own experience, or when the issues require professional involvement and support.

Referrals can often be confused with signposts, but here's the key difference:

A **signpost** involves informing a student about a service or services, and making sure they know how to get there.

A **referral** means making sure a service is aware that a student may need their help and asking the service to offer support.

The best support a Peer Supporter can provide is often a combination of genuine concern, attentive listening, and appropriate referrals to specialist help. It's crucial to recognise situations that require external involvement and to confidently guide peers toward professional assistance. A key aspect of effective peer support is identifying problems and referring them when they exceed your expertise—when in doubt, always refer.

If you encounter a student in distress or expressing suicidal thoughts, remember that you don't have to handle this alone. Offer a listening ear while promptly referring the student to the Student Counselling Services. If you are concerned about the safety of the student or others, take the student directly to S2S, the Student Counselling Service, or the College Health Centre. If the student refuses to go, report your concerns to the service directly and let them know who you are concerned about and why, so they can take necessary action to ensure everyone's safety and wellbeing.

Referrals

When to Refer

It is important to know what a referral is and what situation warrants a referral. A referral is not needed if someone just starts crying. This can be uncomfortable, but it is not a reason to refer someone. However, if a person is crying because they've just expressed a desire to end their life, that is a time to refer. A referral occurs when you believe the person's needs require help beyond what you can provide.

Someone may need to be referred if:

- The problem requires specialist help.
- You are unable to be genuine, honest, and impartial.
- You are worried that the person might come to harm or get into deeper problems.
- You are concerned about your own circumstances (e.g. you have exams, have had a recent bereavement, etc.).

Situations that always call for specialist help:

- Depression and/or suicidal thoughts
- Extreme stress, anxiety, or panic
- Unresolved grief
- Alcoholism/drug abuse
- Serious medical problems
- A child may be at risk of harm.

Referrals

Where to Refer

Where a student is referred depends on the situation at hand. Here are some resources and services you may use for referrals.

Resources in Trinity

Tutor/ Postgraduate Advisor

Students' Union

Student Counselling Service

Student Learning Development

College Health Service

disAbility Service

Dignity, Respect & Consent Service

External Resources

DUBDOC:	01 45 45 607
Samaritans (24 hours):	116 123
Niteline:	1800 793 793
Text About It:	Text TCD to 50808
AWARE:	1800 80 48 48

Emergency contacts:

TCD **out of hours support information**.

- College Security 01 896 1999
- Ralph Armstrong-Astley: 085 7833 548
- Student Counselling Service: 01 896 1407
- Trinity College Health Services: 01 896 1591 / 8555 / 1556
- Assistant Junior Dean: 01 896 4802

Referrals

How to Refer

Referrals need to be handled sensitively. If someone has shared their worries with you, it means they trust you and are hoping that you can help and support them. It's important to remember that a poor referral scenario could negatively impact a student who has confided in a peer.

Possible negative reactions:

- Abandoned, rejected, unheard
- They aren't able to help me
- I'm a hopeless case
- My problems aren't serious enough
- They're too busy to help me
- They aren't interested in helping
- I'm a burden to them

Knowing the possible reactions or feelings someone may have to a referral, it is best to give the student time and be as sensitive as possible.

Choose your words carefully, use phrases like:

- You might find it helpful to…
- You might like to talk with…
- Would you consider talking with…
- I think it might be useful for you to…
- How would you feel about talking to...
- What do you think might happen if you spoke to...

Be honest. Tell the person why you are not the best person or why someone else might be better help at that moment. You can always stay in touch and offer listening support and a check-in if they need it.

Referrals

Reluctant Peers

When you believe that a peer might benefit from professional help, it is best to be honest about your reasons and express your concern about their wellbeing. Sometimes people may be reluctant or shy in accepting a referral, so here are some suggestions.

They deserve support

Dispel myths that surround seeking help. Encourage your peer to schedule 'just one' appointment with a professional, and often, one appointment is all that is needed.

Explore their reluctance

If your peer is reluctant to seek help, ask why they are not keen on seeing a professional. If you explore their reluctance, you may be able to help encourage them.

Give them the details

If they are unsure about seeking help, it may be useful to provide the person with names and contact numbers that can be used at a later date.

Second opinion needed

Explain that the problem is outside of your area of expertise, and you'd like to connect them with someone who may know more.

Suggest all options

A peer may not want to see a counsellor but will agree to visit a GP or may choose to talk with a chaplain. Present all the person's options when discussing support services.

Help make an appointment

Ask if they would like you to arrange an appointment with a professional. If you arrange the appointment, inform the professional of your specific concerns regarding the person.

Honesty about involvement

If you feel the situation is an emergency and the person will not see a professional, you may need to speak to someone on their behalf. If possible, gently explain that you will need to speak with a professional. Sometimes it can be useful to give the person the choice about who you will contact.

Referrals

Questions

What is a crisis and what do you do?

A crisis is when you are concerned about a person's immediate wellbeing. In a crisis, you should seek urgent professional attention from any of the supports listed on page 44. If appropriate, you may want to accompany the person to a professional. A crisis is not when a person cries or if they are managing an ongoing difficulty (unless it has become an immediate crisis, and their wellbeing is endangered).

What if I need support?

If you have any concerns about what is best to do, please talk to the S2S Coordinator. They will support you and help you to clarify the best course of action. Please remember that if you have serious worries about a peer, it is important that you yourself have adequate support. You need to feel confident that you have done all that you can do to make sure that the student is safe.

What if the person refuses?

Unless it is an emergency (potential harm to self or others), everyone has the right to refuse support. They may just need time to think about a referral. Offer an open invitation to the person to come back to you. When you see the person again, ask how they are and reiterate that support is available if they want it. Refusal to seek professional help does not mean that you must provide help that is outside your area of expertise.

In case of emergency

Phone campus security on 01 896 1999 in case of an emergency. They can contact an ambulance for you and will then know where to direct an ambulance when it arrives.

Communication Essentials

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Boundaries

Personal boundaries are simply the lines we draw for ourselves in terms of our level of comfort around others. They are an important part of self-care and are crucial for avoiding **burnout** and minimising **vicarious trauma**.

Situations can arise that make these boundaries unclear. As a Peer Supporter, there are many boundaries that you should practice for the benefit of yourself and others.

Knowing your role

- You can support someone without needing to 'solve' the problem.
- Know the limits of the Peer Support relationship – be clear about your role.
- You have a right to your privacy – don't share your phone number with a student.

Student dynamics

- Establish clear boundaries for meet-ups, e.g., restrict to an hour between 9 am and 5 pm, or use our Out of Hours Protocol.
- Take responsibility for choosing meeting locations. If you can't use the 1:1 room, choose a public place – never go to a pub or someone's apartment.
- It is not acceptable to start a romantic relationship with someone you meet through Peer Support – the relationship dynamic is different from a normal friendship.

Knowing your limits

- Expect the same level of respect from others that you offer to them.
- It's ok to say no to a case.
- Involve others to avoid becoming burdened by a situation – make full use of your supervision and debriefs.

Vulnerability

Dr Brené Brown's research highlights that vulnerability isn't weakness; it's courage. Being open about our fears, emotions, and uncertainties allows us to build genuine connections and trust with others. In Peer Support, showing vulnerability helps create safe, honest spaces where people feel seen and heard.

See below for a short video from Brené Brown on vulnerability.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to refrain from assuming that we know how someone else feels and engage with what they are saying in a way that helps us to understand their experience. It's not about imagining how you would feel in someone else's shoes, but about truly grasping what it's like for them.

To understand empathy better, Dr Brené Brown has some great insights:

- Perspective-taking or making the effort to see and understand the world from another person's viewpoint
- Staying out of judgment and actively listening.
- Recognising emotions in another person that you may have felt yourself.
- Communicating that you understand and recognise those emotions.

'Empathy fuels connection. Sympathy drives disconnection'

'Rarely can a response make something better. What makes something better is connection'

'Empathy is a choice, and it's a vulnerable one'

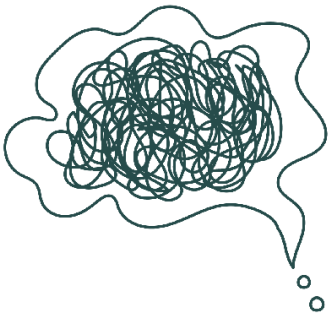
To learn more, watch this really helpful video from Brené Brown:

Triggers

A trigger is anything that evokes a strong emotional reaction in you, often linked to a past experience or memory.

Identifying Your Triggers

- Reflect on topics or experiences that have affected you personally.
- Consider what might be difficult for you to hear someone else talk about.
- Be aware that strong emotional responses can arise unexpectedly, even if you feel prepared.



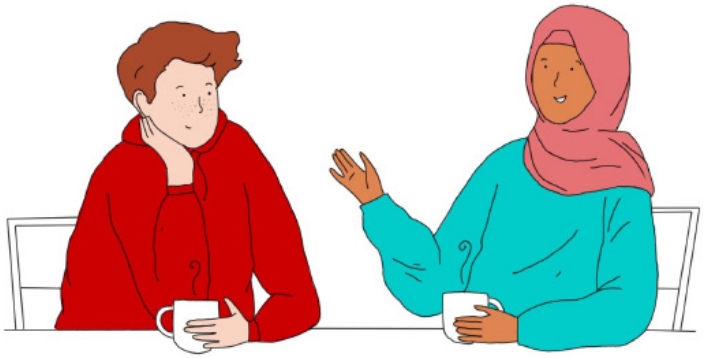
What to Do If You Feel Triggered

- If something feels overwhelming during a Peer Support meeting, it's okay to step back.
- Let S2S staff know if you've been triggered or need support.
- Being aware of your triggers helps protect both you and the person you're supporting.

Remember, being triggered can mean having a strong reaction, including an urge to act on a situation, solve a problem for someone or otherwise take on responsibility that isn't your's to hold. Whenever you sense this happening, please check in with the S2S staff.

Active Listening

Listening is probably the most important skill required when helping another person. Active listening is the practice of listening that reflects understanding back to the speaker. It is a fantastic way to demonstrate empathy and understanding, and ultimately creates a more enriching conversation.



Being truly listened to can have a powerful impact on someone; it can help them to feel that what they say matters and that they are not alone. It can often be more valuable to listen to a problem than to find a solution for it. But how do we make sure we are listening and that a person feels heard?

How to listen well:

- Ask questions and summarise what was said.
- Make appropriate and encouraging remarks.
- Allow long silences.
- Use appropriate eye contact.
- Use encouraging facial expressions.
- Be relaxed.
- Avoid being distracted or daydreaming.
- Be aware of your responses.
- Listen and concentrate, rather than think about how to respond.
- Be careful not to assume and guess at details to “fill in” parts of the conversation.

Signs of not listening:

- Lack of eye contact or looking elsewhere.
- Negative body language
- Fidgeting or otherwise preoccupied.
- Checking a watch/clock/phone.
- Facial expression, showing boredom.
- Tone of voice is poor/disinterested.
- Making jokes.
- Offering solutions too soon.
- Changing the subject of conversation.
- Rushing a conversation.

Active Listening
Responses

When practising active listening, we can provide engaging responses that evoke further discussion. Key responses include reflecting, paraphrasing, summarising, clarifying, and encouraging. It's important to understand how and when to apply these responses so students feel heard.

Feeling Unheard:

Not feeling heard can lead to anger, frustration, a sense that no one understands you and sometimes a feeling that you don't matter or don't count.

Body Language:

Non-verbal communication is essential for listening. It is estimated that facial expressions and body language account for 80% of the communication that occurs in a conversation.

Reflecting:

Reflecting is a very important tool used to mirror the meaning and feelings of what someone has said. This communicates an understanding of a speaker's point of view.

Example: A peer is very anxious about doing an oral presentation in front of everyone in the class. She says to you, "I won't be able to do it. I'll just get up there and freeze!"

Reflection: "…You'll get up and freeze?"

Paraphrasing:

Paraphrasing is the skill of restating what someone just said in your own words. It combines thoughts, feelings, or actions to provide a clearer picture. It also reassures the person that you have heard what they said and encourages them to explore further.

Accuracy is important when paraphrasing, but if you're unsure of what was said, attempting to paraphrase gives the other person a chance to correct you and elaborate further. You can start paraphrasing with:

- "I hear you saying that…"
- "If I understand correctly, you…"
- "It sounds like you…"
- Note: "You're not making yourself clear. Did you mean..." "You've not expressed that very well..."

Example: A student describes a heated argument between himself and his father over the father's refusal to lend him money. As he talks of his anger, his eyes fill with tears.

Paraphrase: "So you are cross with your father for not giving you the loan, and at the same time you are feeling upset."

Things to keep in mind:

- Be tentative and offer your impression of what someone else has said.
- Avoid telling, informing. or defining the other person.
- Be respectful: don't judge, dismiss, or use sarcasm.
- Use your own words: repeating what was said is not paraphrasing.
- Try to tune into the other person's language and use exact words when characterising an event or situation.
- Listen to the depth of feeling expressed in the person's voice and reflect accordingly in your response.
- Do not add to what the person has said; avoid interpretations and evaluations.
- Be genuine and don't pretend.

Summarising:

Summarising pulls together the main points of a discussion, organising them for review, confirmation, or correction. Summaries can serve various purposes, such as:

- Prioritising and refocusing scattered thoughts and feelings.
- Closing the discussion of a particular theme.
- Opening a further discussion.
- Checking understanding of the conversation.
- Prompting deeper exploration of an idea.
- Refocusing a conversation that seems to be going nowhere.
- Beginning to consider possible ways forward.

Example: In the following response, the listener summarises what a peer has said and adds a question to help the peer move forward.

Summary: "May I just check that I have understood this correctly? You've told me of a few choices open to you. You could try to deal with procrastination yourself and make an appointment to meet with your tutor or enrol in a study skills group and none of the options feel like a perfect solution. What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of each of these possibilities?"

Guidelines:

- Put together the key ideas and feelings into broad statements, capturing the main details.
- Attend to the student's various themes and emotional overtones.
- Be brief and direct.
- Do not add to what the person has said and avoid interpretations and evaluations.

Clarifying:

Clarifying is used when you're not quite sure what the other person means or when their message is vague or confusing. Asking for clarification helps avoid misunderstanding and shows that you're genuinely engaged. It also gives the speaker a chance to think more deeply and express themselves more clearly.

You can clarify by asking questions that invite the speaker to explain further. For example:

- "Can I ask what you mean by____?"
- "When you say ____, what does that look like for you?"
- "Could you tell me a bit more about ____?"

Example: A student says, "I'm just done with it all."

Clarification: "Can I ask what you mean when you say 'done with it all'?"

Encouraging:

Encouraging responses aren't about pushing someone to talk before they're ready, they're about helping the other person feel at ease and showing that you're actively listening. These short, supportive phrases help build trust and create space for openness and connection.

Examples:

- "I'm listening."
- "What happened next?"
- "Take your time."

Active Listening
Asking Questions

Questions are an important part of a conversation. They need to be used appropriately to benefit a discussion.

Guidelines for asking questions:

- Ask questions that serve a purpose.
- Ask questions that have substance to them - to help the person get somewhere, to gather information that is useful for the person.
- Take questioning very slowly. Many people need to develop trust in a person to feel comfortable.
- Do not ask too many questions to avoid making a person feel "grilled".

Some questioning styles to avoid:

Why Questions

- 'Why' questions can put people on the defensive as they can imply that they should know the answers already.
- "Why isn't this working for you?" "Why do you not understand this?"

Intimate Questions

- Some questions are not appropriate to ask because they may be too personal or not relevant. Always be respectful and avoid being voyeuristic.
- "And then what did you do in bed?" "Are you gay?"

Leading Questions

- Leading questions assume we already know the answer before a person has answered.
- "That's hard for you, isn't it?" "When will you tell your parents?"

Poorly Timed Questions

- Such questions interrupt the flow of a person sharing their story. They can be inconsiderate and can abruptly end a conversation.
- "How long has this been going on for?" (asked in the midst of someone divulging that he smokes too much marijuana).

Active Listening

Question Types

Open questions cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no" response, or with a static response.

This type of question encourages exploration.

"How are you?"

"What happened next?"

Closed questions are questions to which an answer must be finite or selected from a limited set, such as "yes" or "no".

This type of question is useful for checking in and seeking clarification.

"Do you want to take a break?"

"What month did you move to Dublin?"

Hypothetical questions ask someone to imagine how a possible plan of action could work out.

This type of question is a great way to introduce suggestions/ideas.

"What do you think would happen if you told your dad about the debt?"

Leading questions assume that the questioner knows the answer and puts it in the other person's mouth.

This type of question these tells someone what you want them to think/say.

"That's hard for you, isn't it?"

"When will you tell your parents?"

Judgmental questions are coloured by your personal opinion on the situation. This type of question tells someone how you feel.

To maintain a non-judgemental, non-directive space:

- Ask to explore – not to persuade.
- Be mindful of context and tone of voice.
- Don't put pressure on them to answer.

"You would never do something like that, would you?"

Avoiding Advice Giving

Peer support is not about solving someone's problems. It is about providing a space where a person can feel heard and listened to.

Try not to be solution-led in your responses. Instead, ask questions that will help lead a person to decide what action they would like to take. If you think some kind of support might be helpful for them, phrase it as a question and allow them to decide whether to act on it.

Examples:

- "Would you say..?"
- "Does it feel as though..?"
- "What do you think would happen if..?"
- "How do you think you would feel about..?"

What if they ask me what would I do?

Sometimes a student may ask, "What do you think I should do?" or "What would you do in my situation?" In these cases, the same rule applies. Frame your response as a question that allows them to come to their own decision.

If in doubt, you can use this framework of questions.

- What is the real challenge here for you?
- What have you tried already?
- If you could try anything to solve this, what would you try?
- And what else? (Repeat two or three times, as needed)
- Which of these options interests you most?
- What might stand in the way of this idea, and what could be done about that?
- What is one step you could take to start this, right away?

Common Pitfalls

While asking open questions, reflecting, paraphrasing, summarising, clarifying and encouraging are great alternatives to finding solutions, it's important to avoid the following common pitfalls:

- **Parroting**: Repeating words back without adding understanding or meaning.
- **Omitting**: Leaving out key details or emotions shared by the speaker.
- **Over-analysing**: Interpreting or dissecting beyond what was actually said.
- **Over-expansion**: Adding unnecessary detail or speaking at length beyond the point.
- **Exaggerating**: Amplifying or distorting what the speaker shared.
- **Underscoring**: Adding emphasis on the speaker's behalf.
- **Rushing**: Pushing the speaker to move on before they're ready.
- **Lagging**: Responding too slowly or hesitantly, which can interrupt the flow.

Being Comfortable with Silence

Silence in a conversation can be a rich experience. The absence of noise allows time to think and reflect, space to sit with another person and to feel an emotion.

Unfortunately, most people fear silence in a conversation, and it can feel uncomfortable if you are not used to it. Sitting with a person in silence often shows deep, empathic understanding. Through practice, we learn to recognise the difference between “stuck” silence and “reflective” silence. If you are unsure about the silence, it is OK to ask the person to clarify.

Otherwise, lean into the silence and stay with it. Try to avoid filling a silence when it starts to feel uncomfortable. A helpful tip is to remain in silence for as long as you’re comfortable, then slowly count to 20.

“True silence is the rest of the mind; it is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.”
- William Penn

Owning your Statements

In our desire to help, we can over-identify with another person and assume that both their problems and our problems are similar, when in fact they are not.

'I' statements seek to maintain distinct boundaries between people in a conversation and help clarify personal experience and opinions.

One important aspect of listening is for a person to 'own' personal statements about feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Consider possible ways that you might use 'I' statements when chatting with a peer. Owning statements is often most effective when combined with reflecting, paraphrasing, and summarising.

Example:

- "You wanted to talk to him about it, but you were nervous as to how he would respond? As I listen to you, I find myself getting very angry with him and feeling tense. Is this how you felt?"
- "I hear what you are saying about having to share a room with your cousin. I would feel claustrophobic with such an arrangement; how do you find it?

Avoid:

- "You felt angry and tense!" (assuming the other person's response and putting words into their mouth)
- "That happened to me once and I… (focusing on yourself and assuming that the situations are similar)

This TED Talk by psychologist Harriet Lerner explores the idea in more detail.

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Self-Care

When you become a Peer Supporter, self-care is a vital part of your role. Self-care is all about looking after yourself. It can look like relaxing, spending time with friends, getting a coffee and more. It can also include placing boundaries, knowing when to say no and recognising burnout. Having a toolbox of self-care strategies will allow you to engage as a Peer Supporter and prioritise your mental health.

Think about the things you like to do that you enjoy or that allow you to get a case off your mind. Make a list and make sure you engage in one of them before or after a case.

Remember that you can't pour from an empty cup. It is so important to look after yourself if you want to be an effective Peer Supporter.

Me-Time

Me-time refers to time intentionally set aside for oneself to engage in activities that are personally meaningful, enjoyable, or restorative. It involves being alone by choice and doing something simply because it brings you joy, calm, or a sense of self-connection.

Unlike self-care, which often includes intentional efforts to manage stress, prevent burnout, or support mental health, me-time doesn't have to serve a wellness goal. It might be playful, indulgent, aimless, or reflective. Me-time is not about "fixing" yourself or being productive; it's about being with yourself.

Key Differences

Self-Care

- Supports mental and physical health
- May include boundaries, sleep, exercise, and therapy, etc.
- Often restorative or health-focused
- "I need this to function"

Me-Time

- Supports identity, autonomy, and joy
- May include hobbies, downtime, and creative play, etc.
- Often exploratory or pleasure-focused
- "I want this for myself"

Balance and Overlap

While me-time and self-care can serve different purposes, there is often an overlap. What feels like self-care to one person might be me-time to another, and vice versa. The key is recognising what you need to protect your wellbeing and make space for rest, reflection, and fulfilment.

Supervision and Debriefs

Group Supervision

Once a month you will attend mandatory group supervision with one of the counsellors from the Student Counselling Service. This group will be with your fellow Peer Supporters and will be a confidential space for you to discuss your cases, explore different approaches for your student or share any difficulties you are having. Not only do you have the support of a counsellor in this session, but also the support of your peers.

These sessions are mandatory and can't be rescheduled. Make sure to prioritise these group sessions.

Debriefing

Debriefs are private 1:1 chats with the S2S Coordinator or the S2S Programme Officer. You are required to have a debrief after the first session with new students. After that, you can decide how often you would like to debrief. Debriefs are a chance for you to get your feelings off your chest, find some validation and reflect on the case you just had.

- What do you feel went well?
- What would you like to work on?
- Was anything particularly difficult?

You can book a debrief via the **booking link** on the S2S website.

Please note: S2S don't offer online appointments for debriefs - these should happen in person. Please make sure you're available and on campus for the debrief slot you book.

If no slots are available within the necessary timeframe, please email the office with your availability and we'll arrange something for you.

Am I helping?

Something you might find yourself asking as a Peer Supporter is “how do I know that I am helping?” The short answer is, you may never know. Even if a student says, “Thank you, that really helped”, you may not believe it.

Instead of seeking external indicators, believing you are helping starts with self-acceptance and throwing away the idea of perfectionism.

You simply being there for your student, sitting with them and listening to them is helping. A person may be seeking advice and not be ready for Peer Support, but that does not mean you are doing it wrong.

“Perfectionism is not about achievement and growth. Perfectionism is the belief that if we live perfectly, look perfectly and act perfectly, we can avoid the pain of blame, judgment, and shame.

Perfectionism is a 20-ton shield that we lug around thinking it will protect us when, in fact, it’s the thing that’s really preventing us from taking flight.”

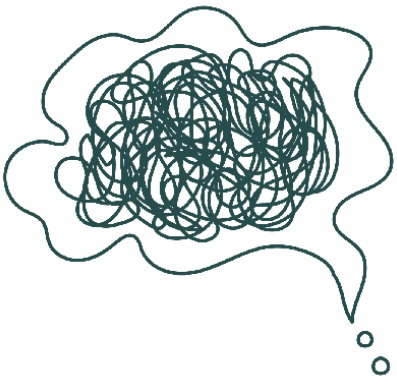
Brené Brown, 2010

Burnout

Becoming a Peer Supporter is something that takes a lot of energy, passion, and involvement. You may have been driven to the role out of a desire to help people, and because of this, you may at times experience burnout. Burnout can make tasks more difficult, and you may find yourself struggling to do something you once enjoyed doing. But what is that exactly?

Burnout is a reduction in motivation and enthusiasm for something that you were once passionate about, and can sometimes leave you feeling resentment for it. Burnout can lead you to feel:

- Exhausted
- Disinterested
- Stressed
- Frustrated
- Overwhelmed by everyday tasks



Taking a step back

Burnout is our body's way of telling us it's time for a break. It is important not to power through it, but to prioritise rest, take a step back and look after yourself so that you can step back in. Burnout doesn't appear overnight and it continues to get worse if we continue to neglect ourselves.

Stepping back does not mean stepping out. It can be a difficult decision, especially when you are passionate about Peer Support, but sometimes it can be the best decision for you. Stepping back gives you a chance to recharge and recover, and then come back to Peer Support with a renewed passion.

When you need to step back for a time, reach out to the S2S office, and we will support you through this. Any active cases can be reassigned.

Once you feel ready to step back in, get in touch with S2S, and you will be welcomed back. Taking a break and stepping back will not affect your role as a Peer Supporter and is always encouraged if you are ever feeling burnt out.

Minding Yourself, Minding Others

When you take on a caring role and help others, you may find yourself in distressing situations where someone shares something traumatic and/or displays intense emotions. Following a distressing event, it's very common to experience strong emotional or physical reactions yourself, even if you were indirectly involved.

Common reactions:

There is no right or wrong way to feel, and it's vital to be aware of your own needs while you care for others. Even if you don't feel immediately affected, some reactions can appear days or even months afterwards.

- Shock and disbelief
- Numbness
- Feelings of helplessness and vulnerability
- Sadness
- Guilt - believing you could have done more to help
- Anger at those responsible
- Relief that it's over
- Relief that it's over
- Relief that it's not you
- Nightmares
- Intrusive images/flashbacks
- Poor concentration
- Racing thoughts
- Shaking
- Lump in throat
- Nausea

Dealing with these feelings

It's important to take care of yourself and show yourself the same kindness you show others, especially after a distressing event. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

Acknowledge your feelings:

The way you feel matters because you matter. Ignoring your feelings can slow down recovery, and even though it may be uncomfortable, it's important to allow yourself to experience your emotions. Changes or disturbances in sleep, appetite, focus, or a tendency to withdraw or avoid being alone can be strong indicators that you feel overwhelmed. Try not to invalidate your feelings by

telling yourself you “shouldn’t” feel upset - this is a common response, but often something we would never say to anyone but ourselves.

Reach out for support:

If you are struggling after a Peer Support session, S2S and SCS staff can help you process your feelings. Try not to isolate yourself from others and remember that you deserve support just as much as anyone else. You’re never a “burden”, and people are here to help.

Get plenty of rest:

It’s okay to take time to rest and recover from your experience. Give yourself time and compassion.

Do something kind for yourself:

Whether it’s writing in a journal, watching a comfort show, spending time in nature, or going to the cinema...try to engage in activities that bring you joy and comfort.

Reflection Exercises

Here are some prompts to help you understand how you may be feeling and identify some areas where you need more support. You can use these prompts to write journal entries or simply think about your experience.

1. If you had to recount the experience to a friend or therapist, where would you start? How would you describe it?

2. When you think about the event, how does your body feel? Is there any tension or discomfort?

3. Picture a close friend or loved one. If what you experienced had happened to them, how would you react? Is there a difference in the way you would talk to them compared to how you speak to yourself?

4. What brings you joy lately? Is there anything completely unrelated to work/college? Is there anything you do that’s just for yourself, and no one else? What would that look like?

Living Wholeheartedly

Researcher Brené Brown describes Wholehearted Living as a way of approaching life that embraces vulnerability, self-compassion, and resilience. It means choosing courage over comfort, connection over perfectionism, and rest over burnout.

Her guideposts below offer gentle reminders of how to stay grounded, joyful, and true to yourself, even while showing up for others:

ILLUSTRATED BY ANDREA PIPPINS

Brené Brown's Wholehearted Living Inventory

Brené Brown's Wholehearted Living Inventory is a self-reflection tool that invites you to consider how fully you're living in alignment with values like compassion, authenticity, and resilience by responding to a short series of statements. If you'd like to take a moment to reflect, you might find it useful:

https://brenebrown.com/wholeheartedinventory/

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S2S Society

S2S
Student 2 Student Society

The S2S Society is the social and community arm of Student 2 Student. It is an official CSC society, that you can become a member of, or join the committee.

The S2S Society creates opportunities for volunteers to connect, unwind, and build a wider sense of community across all Mentor groups. It is a space where S2S volunteers can meet others outside of their own course or mentee group, take part in social events, and continue building friendships throughout the year.

The Society can also assist with booking larger campus rooms including the Atrium, see the Room Booking page for further information.

The Society complements your role as a Mentor by giving you opportunities to:

- Socialise with other volunteers
- Take a break from your mentoring responsibilities
- Be part of the wider S2S community

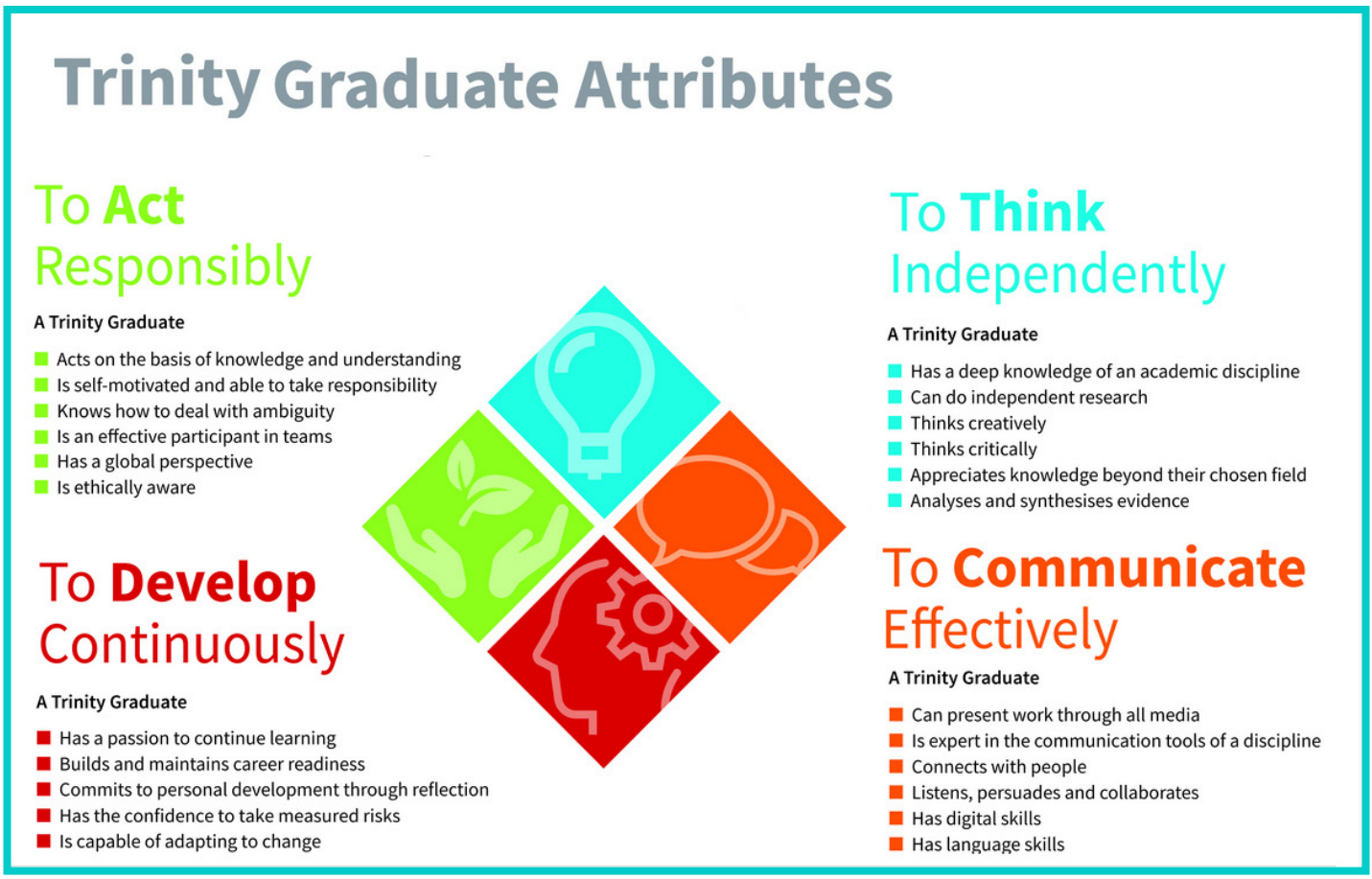
Find our more about the S2S Society:

- **CSC Website**
- **S2S Website**
- **Instagram:** @TCDs2sSociety

Award Ceremony

Every year, there is a dedicated award ceremony for all our fantastic volunteers. This is a time to reflect on the incredible work done, and to give each other a well-earned pat on the back! Keep up with your de-briefs and sharing meeting details, make sure we know the work you are doing so we can congratulate you when it comes to award ceremony season!

Trinity Graduate Attributes



Trinity College Dublin has identified specific Graduate Attributes that students should be able to demonstrate upon graduation. They are important because they will:

- Enhance your learning. Working on them will help you become a better and more successful student.
- Help to prepare you for your future and lifelong learning given the changing nature of society.
- Enhance your employability as they are highly desired skills by employers.

During your time as a student in Trinity you will have the opportunity through your coursework and assessments as well as cocurricular and extra-curricular activities to develop and improve these attributes - being an S2S volunteer allows you to develop these attributes.

Employability

Your learning and involvement during your time as a Trinity student gives you the opportunity to develop key attributes and skills that will allow you to succeed in your future as an individual and as a member of society.

The Trinity Careers Service offers advice and resources to help current students and graduates prepare for the future, including:

- **MyCareer portal**: Jobs, employer events, 1-1 career appointments, CV clinics
- **Trinity Career Skills Award**: Stand out in your job interview!
- **Make great applications** and **Get you interview ready:** Helping you to get the job
- **More Career Service resources**

Trinity students can avail of the Trinity Careers Service for advice and resources relating to interviewing, searching for jobs, career planning and more.

James Carey 2023/24 Mentor

'It has gave me a great sense of accomplishment and pride over the past year. I never thought I would have the confidence to take up a role like a mentor but the feeling you get from knowing you are making a difference is unmatched.'

Interview Prep

Good interview preparation can improve your performance on the day and help reduce interview nerves. When the day of the interview comes, you should feel that you have a good understanding of the role and the company from your research and have prepared evidence to demonstrate how you meet the role requirements. Anticipating and preparing for the types of questions they are likely to ask will help you to make a strong impression.

Interview Questions

In advance of an interview, it's advisable to review the job description, highlight the key requirements, and come up with a list of questions that you think they could ask, alongside a list of your evidence to support the reasons why you are a suitable candidate. You can then practice answering these before the interview itself.

STAR

When asked to give examples, structure your answers using the STAR framework, which can help you to communicate your competencies clearly and simply. When you outline your example, make sure to cover each of the following elements:

Situation:	Describe the context of the example
Task:	Explain what you had to do
Action:	Describe the actions you took, give details about what you did.
Result:	What was the outcome? What made it successful or unsuccessful? What would you do differently another time?

Adapted from the **TCD Careers Website**

Thank you for being a Peer Supporter - S2S couldn't do it without you!

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Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
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S2S
Student 2 Student