



fdi  Project
FDI World Dental Federation

Mental Health and
Well-being in Dentistry

PEER SUPPORT GUIDE

A guide for setting up peer mentoring or
support groups in dental schools

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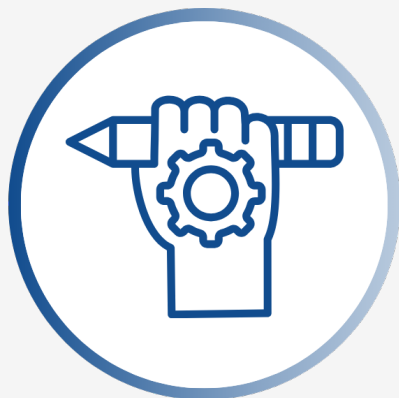
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Introduction to peer support

Peer support is one of the most powerful tools for improving student well-being, professional identity, and resilience during training. Whether you want to create a mentoring scheme or an informal support group, this guide will help you build something meaningful and sustainable.

Sharing your experiences and feelings with other people who may be going through similar situations can have a positive impact on everyone involved. This form of social support can help in two ways:



Practical support

Advice and support in tackling the stresses and strains of practice



Emotional support

Empathic acknowledgement of the impact that workplace stress is having on the individual's life

This guide can be used to help you set up and run a successful peer support group for your dental school.

How to set up a peer support group

Step 1: Define the purpose

What do you want the group to do?

Consider which of the following layouts aligns best with your goals:

Mentoring

Pairing senior students with juniors for guidance and support

Support group

A safe, non-judgmental space to share experiences, challenges, and emotional ups and downs

Study circles

Academic support, including clinical revision and case discussion



Getting started tip:

- You can combine these ideas to achieve your specific aim, but be clear on the primary purpose when promoting the group

Step 2: Identify key stakeholders

You'll need buy-in to get started. Talk to:



A supportive faculty member (e.g., well-being lead or academic tutor)



The student union or dental society



Existing student reps or year group leaders

Ask for help with:

- Promotion, such as cohort-wide emails or announcements during lectures
- Room bookings or online hosting platforms, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams
- Gaining recognition in the curriculum or establishing peer support activities

Step 3: Choose a structure

Decide how the group will run:

Mentoring



One-to-one or small group model



Provide basic training for mentors (e.g., listening skills, boundaries)



Match by year group, shared interests, or career goals

Support group



Peer-led, rotating facilitators, or co-facilitated by a trained student



Ground rules for confidentiality, respect, and attendance



Establish themes for each session (e.g., managing stress, first clinicals, impostor syndrome)



Scheduling tip:

- *The frequency of sessions can vary, but a good guide is to provide weekly or fortnightly sessions for support groups and monthly or termly sessions for mentoring check-ins*

Step 4: Set ground rules

Establish expectations early:



What's shared in the group stays in the group



No clinical gossip or identifiable patient information



Listen without fixing; these sessions should provide support, not advice



Respect diverse experiences and opinions



Collaboration tip:

- *During your first session, you can co-create rules to build shared ownership*

Step 5: Promote it thoughtfully

Thoughtful promotion of peer support can include:

- Promoting it as a *safe, non-judgmental, and peer-run* space
- Offering drop-in sessions or pilot a few meetings before full rollout
- Using posters, WhatsApp groups, email bulletins, and social media



For example, you may want to use FDI's **peer support posters** as a starting point, freely available on the FDI website, adding your email address or a QR code with a message along the lines of '*Contact [name] to hear about peer support sessions in [dental school name]*'.

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Mental Health and Well-being in Dentistry

Your mental health matters just as much as your physical health

Mistakes don't define you, they help you **grow**

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*"At the moment, students are working **against** each other, not **with** each other."*
FDI Student Focus Group quote

You're not alone - **work together, succeed together**

Supported by:
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Social media images are also available, if you would like to use them when promoting your sessions. We recommend using the hashtags #DentalStudentWellbeing and #MentalHealthInDentistry.



Promotion tip:

- Avoid promoting the group as “just for people who are struggling”; it should be a safe space for **everyone**

Step 6: Reflect and adapt

- Ask for anonymous feedback after a few sessions. This can be achieved through anonymous notes collected at the end of a session or by using an online feedback tool, such as Google Forms or Jotform, but ensure responses are set to anonymous.
 - Consider asking questions such as:
 - Do the timings work for you?
 - Do you find the sessions welcoming and accessible to all?
 - Do you feel comfortable contributing and being open in the sessions?
- As a session coordinator, it's also important to reflect on ways to enhance the quality and effectiveness of your sessions:

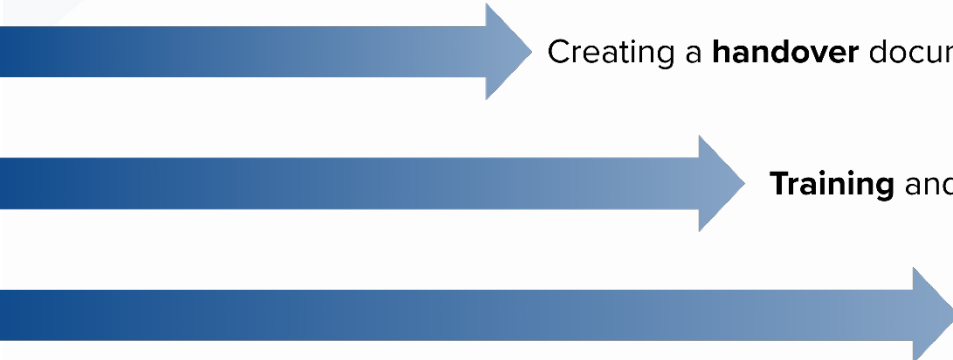


Reflection tip:

- *Adjust the format or structure based on what's working and any feedback you receive*

Sustainability tips

Another important consideration is how you can make these sessions and meetings sustainable so that they are repeated and utilized in future years. This could include:



Creating a **handover** document or mentoring toolkit

Training and **supporting** next year's facilitators

Gaining **recognition** for participation
(e.g., leadership credits, CPD)

Resources

Learn more about the importance of mental health:

Student Minds

- <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/> - A charity committed to empowering students to prioritise their mental health through building a mental health toolkit to support themselves and their peers.

Mental Health First Aid

- <https://mhfainternational.org/> - A global programme providing evidence-based training programmes to provide the knowledge and skills required to support those around them experiencing a mental health problem or crisis.

Acknowledgements

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