



*Global Mental Health Peer Network*  
**www.gmhpn.org**

## **Considerations when working and engaging with persons with lived experience with mental health conditions**

***\*\*\*ALWAYS ASK IF ANY SPECIFIC REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION IS REQUIRED\*\*\****

Through applying the considerations below when working and engaging with persons with lived experience with mental health conditions, may help a person/s to be more productive, effective and efficient. These measures may help improve the person/s' mental health through reducing anxiety, help manage concentration and memory problems, and improve confidence. Most importantly, they will feel valued and respected.

## 1. COMMUNICATION/S

<b>What →→→→→</b>	<b>How →→→→→</b>	<b>Why →→→→→</b>
<p><b>Emails requiring action must reflect "Action required" in the email subject line</b></p> <p><b>Should an urgent response be required, note "Urgent Action Required" in the subject line</b></p>	<p>Be reasonable with the timeframe/s for urgent responses required – for <b>example</b>, if it is just to complete a Doodle Poll, that would be reasonable as it would take about 5 minutes or less. See <b>example</b> below – highlight/bold the action required in the email message box as well.</p> <p>SUBJECT: [Action Required] GMHPN Engagement Session</p> <p>EMAIL MESSAGE BOX:  <i>The GMHPN will be hosting an engagement sessions .....</i>  <b>Action required: Please confirm your attendance by 10 April 2021 by responding to this email.</b></p>	<p>Identifying what to prioritise will help the responsible person to plan their schedule more effectively, causing less anxiety</p>
<p><b>Be reasonable with expected response time required or deadlines to meet</b></p>	<p>Highlight the text in the email or communication document/s that indicate turnaround time for tasks to be completed/ submitted</p>	<p>The person may become overwhelmed when they struggle to determine how and what to prioritise if there's no clear indication on deadlines</p>
<p><b>Be clear about the action/s required in communications</b></p>	<p>List the tasks that are expected from the individual, bullet list each task in order of priority and its deadline/s</p>	<p>The person may become anxious if it is not clear about what exactly is expected of them</p>
<p><b>Be clear in the subject line (ie. what the email relates to)</b></p>	<p>Avoid subject headings such as "<i>meeting</i>", "<i>review</i>" and rather be clearer, for <b>example</b> "<i>GMHPN Executive Committee Meeting – 2021 Plans</i>" or "<i>Request to review the GMHPN Terms of Reference</i>"</p>	<p>Descriptive subject headings help to immediately identify what the email is about and make it easier to search past emails of the same – causing less anxiety and confusion</p>
<p><b>When following up from past emails, please briefly recap what was discussed in past communications before picking up the conversation</b></p>	<p>Even if past emails dated a week ago, it is still preferable to recap the previous conversation, for <b>example</b>:  <i>Following our previous communications last week where we discussed xyz. I would like to .....</i></p>	<p>Memory problems (as a result of medication for example) may make it difficult for the person to recall previous communications and to make a connection to the current communication</p>

## 2. ENGAGEMENT

<b>What →→→→→</b>	<b>How →→→→→</b>	<b>Why →→→→→</b>
<b>All engagement must be part of planning phases, well in advance and never as an afterthought</b>	Include people with lived experience in the initial planning phases of any project, workshop, conference, etc and schedule engagements well in advance	<b>“Nothing about us, without us”</b>
<b>Make sure that your expectations for the engagement is aligned with the individuals’ experience, expertise and skills</b>	<i>Example: if specific tasks are given to group members and aimed at obtaining perspectives and contributions pertaining to a certain topic or area of work, make sure that the person has experience, expertise or skills in this specific field</i>	Even though the person has lived experience with a mental health condition and specific expertise, it does not necessarily mean they have expertise or skills in everything in the field – giving tasks that the person may not be knowledgeable about can result in the person losing confidence in themselves
<b>Provide adequate information about the engagement, including date/s and time/s (include time zone), the purpose of the engagement, what is expected from the participant/s</b>	<p>Make sure to ask what and if any reasonable accommodation is required, prior to the session</p> <p>Be clear about your expectations before, during and after the session – always provide feedback following the session/s</p>	<p>Having all the relevant information on the content and logistics of an engagement session, helps to improve meaningful engagement</p> <p>Clear logistical instructions help to reduce anxiety</p>
<b>Be clear about the logistical arrangements from the outset – be clear about sponsorship availability for travel costs</b>	<p>Initial communication should always be clear on whether or not travel support will be provided for in-person attendance</p> <p>Should travel support be offered, preferably have a dedicated contact person who helps to facilitate or coordinate the travel arrangements</p>	<p>Lived experience involvement should be the centre of any conversation and decision-making in mental health, but due the lack of financial resources to support travel costs, can exclude the important voices of persons with lived experience from conversations and decision-making</p> <p>Travelling away from home can be stressful for some and uncertainty about travel arrangements can cause additional anxiety</p>
<b>Be reasonable with time to prepare for the engagement</b>	An acceptable timeframe would be no less than 2 weeks’ notice in advance to allow for preparation before an engagement session	Some may experience concentration problems, which may mean that they take longer to read

		through information pertaining to the engagement
<b>Consider time zones when setting up virtual meetings, workshops or other engagement sessions - avoid times too early in the morning or at night</b>	Engaging with demographically diverse lived experience groups, it is always advisable to rather set up 2 sessions in different times to accommodate those in different time zones	Some may experience side-effects from medications, making it difficult to wake up early in the mornings, AND for some, they may lose concentration after a long day and would not be able to sustain concentration through to the evening – both these situations have a severe impact on individual’s ability to meaningfully participate
<b>Avoid virtual engagement sessions for longer than 2 hours, rather schedule additional sessions should the engagement require longer time</b>		The virtual world, however effective and accessible, it can be exhausting and reduce concentration capacity – sessions of more than 2 hours for many are the limit
<b>Participants in virtual sessions should avoid virtual backgrounds that are 'too busy', bright colours or over stimulating</b>	Choose a virtual background that has soft colours and not too many objects or imaging	Virtual backgrounds, nowadays used by many, can be distracting when there is too much happening in the image – and some may find it difficult to focus on the conversation
<b>In-person sessions should ensure frequent breaks, proper lighting, limited distractions, avoid over stimulation, and not exceed a 7-hour long session</b>  <b>Be mindful of people who may have difficulty to be in large group settings</b>	Ensure the program of the engagement session allows for breaks, at least every 2 hours. The overall program of a set day, should be limited to no longer than 7 hours, including break times.  The room used for the session should be suitable, not overcrowded and in an enclosed section where there is no foot traffic that could be distracting.	Sustaining concentration for long is often difficult and can be exhausting  Large group settings can exacerbate anxiety of people who live with conditions like social anxiety or psychosis, and set the person off in distress
<b>Persons with lived experience offer their expertise and knowledge as would any professional and should be remunerated for their expertise and participation at events such as consultations, workshops, talks and engagement session</b>	Honorariums are often a means of remuneration for participant engagement or a consultation fee can be negotiated with individuals	Receiving remuneration for expertise, makes a person feel valued, acknowledged and respected for their expertise. Services offered by lived experience must be paid to sustain equality and empowerment.