

Reflect: Understand your networks



What are peer support networks and why are they important?

As a small business owner, you wear many hats - you may be the #1 employee (or only employee), you may manage your financials, deal with suppliers, find and service customers and do the marketing. Most likely you are the face of your business. That's a lot of juggling, particularly if you want a personal life, time with friends and family or are unwell.

"It can be a challenge to look after yourself."

As rewarding as being your own boss is, looking after your own health and wellbeing is as important as your business health. You do not need to choose one or the other, there are things you can do to support both your mental health and your business health.

One of the most powerful things you can do is talk to someone. You already know many people, some of whom you may catch up with from time to time - a friend, relative or mentor. However, a peer is someone who understands the challenges of running a business, of taking risks, of riding the seasons, managing the cash flow, looking after staff, and trying to grow. Someone who has felt anxiety, or stress, tiredness, or frustration.

Talking to a peer helps you see how others have handled the unique challenges of being a small business owner.

Check out **Who's in my network?** To explore your network and identify those who may be worth reaching out to.



Who's in my network?

Activity: Map out your current personal and professional networks.



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Who's in my network?

Understanding who is in your network, both personal and professional, is the first step in being able to identify who you can reach out to when facing challenges that impact on your health and wellbeing or on your business.

This activity will take you approx. 20 mins (so grab a tea or coffee)



Step 1: Download the activity template

To get started, download and print out our **network map activity template**, or simply draw your own.



Step 2: Map your network

Use the first sheet of the template to list the people you are connected to (or know personally), across a range of categories – such as family and friends, clients and customers, to your bookkeeper or legal advisor. You may be friends with many of them but classify them by why you are connected with them. (Use the blank boxes to create your own category).

Then cut each name out and place on the Network Map chart, based on how well you know them - a close friend, casual friend, acquaintance, or a stranger.



Step 3: Reflect on your network map

Things you may notice about your network...

- You interact with more people than you probably thought!
- Some are in both your personal and professional network; some may start as one and become the other
- Each person has a unique relationship with you that differs in purpose, level of trust, frequency of contact etc.
- You may be the 'sounding board' or support person for one or more people.



Step 4: Reach out

So who might you reach out to when facing challenges as a small business owner? Who in your network...

- runs a small business (or has run one)?
- do you trust?
- would you feel comfortable speaking with?

Pick people from your network you could contact to ask a question, or organise a catch-up, or ask for some mentoring.



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This toolkit is part of recommendations made by the Small Business Wellbeing and Support Policy Team (Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources), following collaboration with small business and mental health representatives.

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