



For better  
mental health



## Defining 'Safe Space' in Mental Health Day Services

### Introduction

'Safe space' is one of the four elements of mental health day services laid out in Bromley Mind's Navigator Model. Therefore it should not be viewed in isolation but as one essential component of a person-centred service which also provides opportunities for people to develop skills and confidence and to engage more fully with their local community.

It is inevitable that there is a wide range of views as to what constitutes a 'safe space'. This paper respects the right of individuals to define what is a 'safe space' for them and seeks not to diminish those differences but to establish the common characteristics and defining features of 'safe space'.

This paper was formulated based on discussion between service users, staff and trustees at Bromley Mind.

### Key Features of 'Safe Space'

- Welcoming and friendly
- Physically safe
  - A non-threatening environment
  - A physically appropriate environment with few hazards
- Emotionally safe
  - People feel accepted and understood
  - There is no discrimination or stigma
- Supportive
  - Support is available at times of distress
  - Informal support available to help with resolving difficulties
  - Peers and staff are understanding of mental health needs
  - Peers may have shared some similar experiences
- Familiar
  - Regularly in the same place
  - Regularly with (at least some of) the same people
  - People have a sense of 'belonging'
- People have Choice
  - People do not feel put under unwelcome pressure
  - People have choice and do not feel controlled or patronised

## Variable Features of 'Safe Space'

- **Where it is** – Whilst it is important that 'safe space' takes place in a familiar venue, this might be a dedicated mental health centre, a mental health centre which also has other uses or a local community venue, or a non-mental health setting dedicated for the purpose of 'safe space' at specific times. To ensure it is non-stigmatising a space not labelled 'mental health' is preferable. The people in 'safe space' are more important than the building.
- **Who attends** – Whilst it is important that at least some 'safe space' is only open to people with mental health needs, there may be occasion where further restrictions are appropriate. For example a women only safe space or safe space just for people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities may be appropriate.
- **How it is facilitated** – 'Safe space' may be facilitated by staff, by volunteers or by informal peer support. It may form part of a bigger service (such as Bromley Mind's day services) or be independent (such as a Manic Depression Fellowship (MDF) support group).
- **What happens** – 'Safe space' can be almost entirely unstructured or may have a range of more or less structured activity taking place. Some safe spaces may be centred around a particular activity.
- **How it links to other support** – People's need for 'safety' changes all the time. It is important that 'safe space' does not exist in isolation, and how it links to other forms of support or opportunity will vary. It might operate using the same staff and in the same location as 'fresh start' and 'bridge building' support or work may be needed to provide clear pathways to move to other forms of support.

Bromley Mind  
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## References

Bates P, 2007, 'Safe and Sound' in *Mental Health Today*  
Bromley Mind, 2005, The Navigator Model