

How To Run A Social Contact Event

Social contact events allow speakers to **share their knowledge** and **experiences** of mental health and wellbeing. These can be very **powerful events**, providing students with an opportunity to learn about mental health difficulties in an **engaging** way, from their peers. Events such as these can help to **reduce stigma** and **increase understanding** of mental health issues. Some students may find listening to other students experience beneficial to their recovery by **reducing the feeling of isolation**.

These events require **careful planning** and **good communication** in order to ensure a positive experience for all involved. Below is a guide on the **planning process** followed by some **guidelines for all speakers** to follow.


Initial planning

Decide on the aim of the event:

- Increase understanding and share experiences of a particular issue (depression, social isolation etc.)
- Promoting general mental health and wellbeing
- Focusing on recovery and the important aspects of recovering

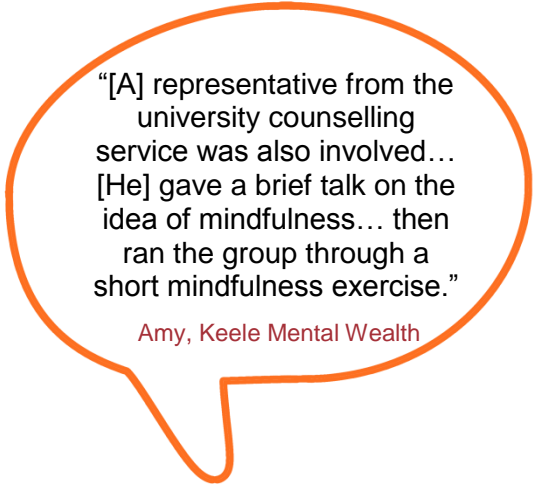
Plan the logistics of the event:

- How many speakers you would like, is this achievable?
- Timings- Time guidance for each speaker, regular short breaks, time for Q&A if you are doing this (if taking questions, think about the types of questions you will accept. You could have a member of your committee take questions to ensure they are sensitive and well-constructed to avoid offence)
- Are you opening the opportunity to speak to staff as well as students?
- Room bookings - how many people you're hoping will attend? Consider requirement of a projector or screen for the event.
- Will you provide refreshments and snacks during the breaks? This could double as a fundraiser.



"[They booked a room for] 30-50 people (this seemed overly ambitious but turned out to be just about right for the amount of attendees we had!)."

Amy, Keele Mental Wealth



"[A] representative from the university counselling service was also involved... [He] gave a brief talk on the idea of mindfulness... then ran the group through a short mindfulness exercise."

Amy, Keele Mental Wealth

We are kindly supported by Comic Relief, The Welton Foundation, UnLtd, The Matthew Elvidge Trust, The Charlie Waller Memorial Trust, The James Wentworth-Stanley Memorial Trust and Student Hubs.

Run up to the event

- Compile a list of local services within the area to aid signposting at the event. As volunteers, you are unable to provide advice of any kind but efficient signposting to the relevant services can be extremely useful.

Recruiting speakers:

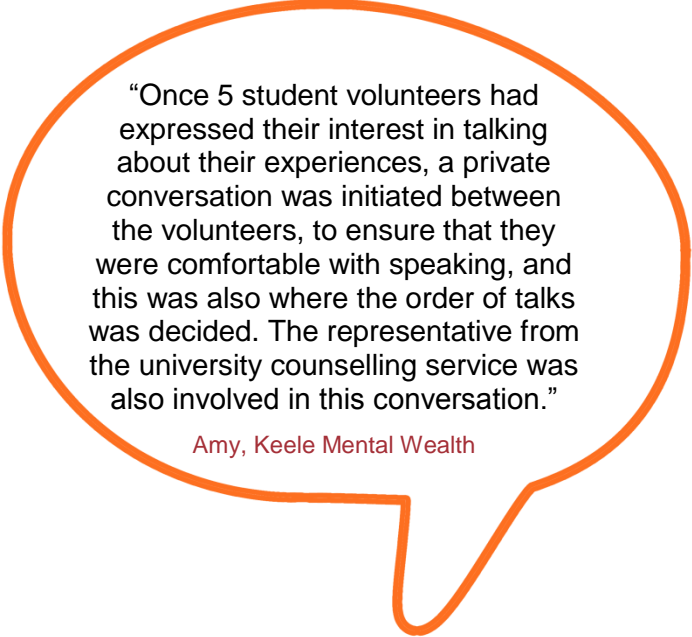
- Would you like a professional to talk about a specific issue from another perspective? See our “Meet the Professional” guide for more information.
- Be as inclusive as possible when asking for and deciding upon student speakers, as well as when advertising the event.
- Talking about personal experience in public can be distressing, for both speakers and attendees when not effectively prepared and managed.
 - Be sure your speakers are aware of the potential triggers and provide some clear guidelines to allow speakers to plan their talk. These guidelines are at the end of this document.
- When you have confirmed a speaker list, create and share a timetable for the night. Make sure your speakers are comfortable with the order they are speaking in. It takes a lot of courage to talk at a social contact event, try and accommodate the wishes of your speakers as much as possible!

Publicity:

- Use your local services and contacts:
 - Social media
 - Your Student Union
 - Local student magazine/newspaper
 - Student Radio station
 - Posters
 - Flyers

Running the event

- Arrive 15-30 minutes before the event is due to start, in order to double check everything is set up.
- Ask speakers to arrive about 15 minutes before the event is due to start. Use this time to ensure they are still comfortable with speaking and



“Once 5 student volunteers had expressed their interest in talking about their experiences, a private conversation was initiated between the volunteers, to ensure that they were comfortable with speaking, and this was also where the order of talks was decided. The representative from the university counselling service was also involved in this conversation.”

Amy, Keele Mental Wealth

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what they are going to say.

- Someone from the society should deliver a short introduction. In this cover;
 - Welcome
 - Schedule for the evening and times for questions
 - Guidelines – why they're in place
 - If at any point the speaker feels uncomfortable they can stop
 - Attendees may request a break be pushed forward, or can step outside of the room at any time (you don't want to keep people who are finding it difficult or triggering from stepping out).
- If things don't go to plan, don't panic!
 - If a speaker withdraws you may like to have a short talk about the society prepared to fill such a gap. You can talk about the aims of Student Minds, events you have planned and opportunities for people to get involved in your group and the wider network (blogging for Student Minds).
- Following all speakers a closing comment should be given;
 - Signpost to support services available
 - Thank the speakers and attendees
 - Information about your group and your contact details

Let us know

The Student Minds Team love hearing about how your events have gone! Fill in the feedback form [online](#).

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