Strong Women: An Information Sheet for Service Providers

Does your organization serve women with both substance use and violence concerns? You might consider offering the Strong Women program.

Strong Women is a virtual social support group, designed to help anti-violence and substance use services better support women who have experienced both intimate partner violence and substance use concerns, encouraging their healing and recovery in an integrated way. Developed by the Centre of Excellence for Women's Health, the Strong Women program is based on insights from research and service providers, and the wisdom of those with lived experience. Strong Women has been tested at women's substance use and anti-violence agencies across Canada.

The goal of Strong Women is to empower women who have been impacted by intimate partner violence and substance use through creating space for social connection, information sharing, development of skills to increase safety and support growth, and improvement in physical and mental health and well-being. Strong Women draws from existing manuals and literature from both the substance use and anti-violence fields that describe recovery principles and approaches. Strong Women emphasizes recovery by facilitating improvement in health, safety, purpose and social networks, based on three foundational approaches.

1

Trauma-Informed

Trauma-informed approaches can foster a sense of self-efficacy, self-determination, dignity, and personal control, in contrast to 'power over' interactions that many women have previously experienced in their relationships. Strong Women creates emotional, cultural and physically safe spaces for participants, where they can learn, and make decisions about their recovery, growth and wellness.

2

Empowering

The Strong Women program draws on 'motivational interviewing' to assist providers in fostering empowerment, partnership, acceptance and compassion. The Strong Women workbook, facilitator's guide, and curriculum use core motivational interviewing communication and group facilitation skills conceptualized as Connect, Expand and Empower.

3

Gender-Informed

Strong Women weaves together evidence-based approaches that address women's sex and gender specific needs in recovery, such as emotion-focused, somatic and nature-based, self compassion, and empowerment-oriented approaches.

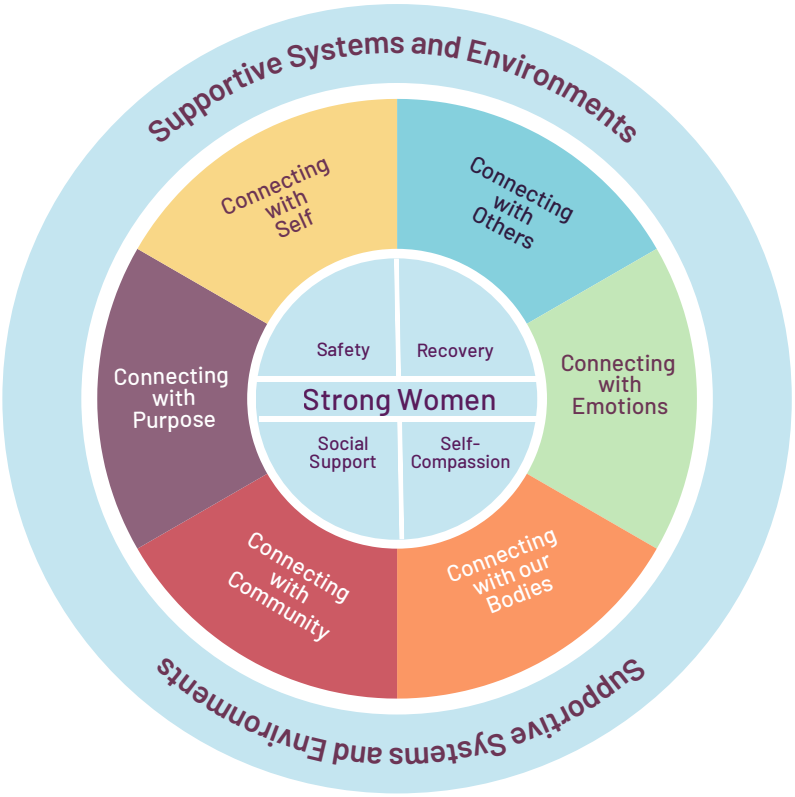
What is included in Strong Women?

Strong Women Workbook

The Strong Women Workbook is for women to use as a valuable companion throughout the journey of recovery and growth. Its six chapters each correspond to a session in the social support group.

The chapters cover a range of topics, including identity, values, relationships, emotions, body care, community connections, and finding purpose in recovery. Each chapter includes informative content, reflective questions, empowering activities, and additional resources.

The workbook offers the opportunity for self-paced exploration and reflection. It situates the experience of violence and substance use within larger systemic inequities and invites reflection on individual and collective change.



Strong Women Social Support Group

The Strong Women Social Support Group is a multi-session curriculum-based program, led by trained facilitators, using a facilitator's guide and a curriculum. Each session aligns with the workbook chapters and includes specific themes, learning objectives, exercises, methods, and supporting resources.

Typically a closed group format, Strong Women accommodates up to 10 women per cohort, providing a safe and supportive space for shared experiences, connection, and growth. Strong Women was designed as a virtual group to increase its accessibility, but it could be launched in person, hybrid or as an open group.

Social support groups can foster connections and alleviate isolation, promote personal growth and healing through shared experiences, emphasizing self-care, instilling hope, and increasing access to support. The Strong Women Social Support Group focuses on empowerment while navigating substance use and intimate partner violence, thus offering a sense of community and inclusivity. And, most importantly, it acknowledges the interconnections between substance use and intimate partner violence in the recovery journey.

Anti-violence and substance use treatment and support services are encouraged to contact the Centre of Excellence for Women's Health if they wish to offer Strong Women. Please email us at bccewh@gmail.com to access the curriculum and facilitation resources.

Strong Women

www.cewh.ca

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