

Peer Support: Getting Oriented

What is Peer Support?

“Peer support is a supportive relationship between people who have a lived experience in common”

- Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support, 2013, Mental Health Commission of Canada, p 11

The Value of Peer Support

- Value in genuinely connecting with another person
- Experiencing genuine compassion, integrity, and empathy when connecting with another person can inspire others to be more compassionate and empathic
- It fosters hope and personal growth
- It promotes health and wellness of the whole person
- It helps to build confidence in oneself (for both peer and volunteer) and inspires self-agency and empowerment
- It promotes the dignity and respect of all people in a non-judgmental environment
- It promotes social inclusion and a sense of belongingness
- Accessing peer support may be someone’s first step toward personal wellness/ getting help.
- Opportunity for personal growth for peers and volunteers

Peer support is about:

- Fostering wellness (and safety) of the whole person
- Genuinely and attentively listening to understand, not to reply
- Empathy, compassion, respect in a judgment-free, safe place
- Empowering peers to help themselves
- Respecting that a person is the expert in their own life
- Respect for each person’s own path, choices, and point of view
- Focusing on strengths and resources
- Validating emotions and challenging experiences
- Mutuality and equality
- Shared responsibility

Peer Support: Philosophy and Values

The Philosophy of Peer Support

“The philosophy of peer support is that each individual has an innate desire to find a path towards recovery, improved health and wellbeing, and has within themselves the knowledge of what will work for them. “

- *Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support, 2013, Mental Health Commission of Canada, p 13)*

- “Person- Centred” Approach
 - The person is the expert when it comes to their own life, not the helper
 - Non-directive (exception of safety consideration)
 - Honors the unique experience of each individual
 - Focus on what the individual wishes to address and honors the kind of help they request

Core Values of Peer Support:

- Empathy and Mutuality
- Self-determination and Equity
- Recovery and Hope
- Non-judgmental
- Compassion
- Inclusivity
- Respect and dignity for all people
- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Honesty

The importance of power in the peer support relationship

- A supportive peer relationship can be a powerful agent of change.
- Equal sharing power in the peer-to-peer relationship is ideal, but not often attainable.
- It's very important to pay careful attention to boundaries and awareness for inevitable power dynamics that accompany a helping relationship

Peer Support Volunteer Principles of Practice

- 1.** Listen, explore their options with them, focus on their strengths, & inform of resources instead of giving advice
- 2.** Communicate effectively and empathically to develop an open, honest, safe and non-judgemental relationship
- 3.** Maintain and advocate for the respect and dignity of all people
- 4.** Value diversity and practice non-judgment. Never practise, endorse, facilitate, contribute, or collaborate in any form of discrimination on any basis such as culture, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, sex, gender, political belief, age, religion, etc.
- 5.** Validate the peer's feelings and perceptions when appropriate
- 6.** Have a caring, compassionate, non-judgmental attitude toward all peers
- 7.** Keep your focus on the peer, not on yourself or your own experience.
- 8.** Empower your peer and foster self-determination: Help them help themselves.
- 9.** Do not give advice. When asked for advice, explore their options and encourage peers to make their own decisions. Discuss referral options without giving advice.
- 10.** Respect that they are the experts in their own lives. Honor their knowledge and experience. Respect that what works for you may not be appropriate for others. Do not give advice.
- 11.** Have proficient resource knowledge and make appropriate referrals
- 12.** Liaise with resources on campus when appropriate and necessary
- 13.** Provide accurate information
- 14.** Respect the various positive interventions that can play a role in promoting recovery (i.e. medication, psychiatry, acupuncture etc.)
- 15.** Commit to continue to develop knowledge and skills related to peer support
- 16.** Seek supervision or other associated health care professional when appropriate.