# Peer Support Training

This is intended to help you identify the training and skills that the members of your Peer Support Program will need to fulfil their role as a Peer Support Mentor or as part of a Peer Support Team.

Peer support is the process of giving and receiving non clinical assistance to support prevention and recovery from severe psychiatric, traumatic or addiction challenges.

A Peer supporter is a someone who can offer assistance and support to promote another peer’s own personal recovery journey and has some form of lived experience. It is important to remember that a Peer Supporter is **not a primary care provider and should not give medical advice or diagnoses**, but instead encourage their peer to seek the appropriate support and care from a professional.

## Peer Support Team Member Competencies

The following are a set of core competencies that were identified in a report on Peer Support Training prepared by *Addictions and Mental Health Ontario* and the *Canadian Mental Health Commission Guidelines for Practice and Training of Peer Support.* (Sunderland & Mishkin, 2016). These competencies should be considered when selecting staff to be members of your peer support program team.

**Lived Experience**

* Ability to relate to the experience and challenge that the peer may be experiencing as a result of exposure to trauma
* Ability to detect when their own stressors and triggers may result in unhealthy or unwanted attitudes or behaviours and a willingness to request assistance
* Ability to demonstrate a sense of hopefulness and strong belief in recovery
* Personal commitment to self-care through stress management and resiliency strategies

**Interpersonal Skills**

* Ability to demonstrate active listening skills which takes a genuine interest in their peer, valuing them as an equal
* Ability to engage peers and encourage action
* Demonstrate warm, empathetic and non-judgmental behaviours and actions towards others
* Encourages peer to explore options and co-create solutions
* Ability to appropriately share their own experiences in a manner that provides insight and assistance to instill hopefulness and focus on recovery

Critical Thinking

* Demonstrate ability to identify issues or problems and explore and evaluate information to guide the development of a resolution
* Encourages open dialogue focused on improved understanding of issues or problems, and/or potential solutions
* Ability to determine true needs of the peer (talking vs. action to initiate change)
* Recognize the importance of the issue to the peer and approach dialogue in a non-judgmental manner and work with the peer to explore options
* Ability to detect when the peer is approach or in a crisis situation and work with the peer to explore alternative paths and/or knowing when to engage additional resources or help

Teamwork and Collaboration

* Clear understanding or roles and responsibilities and knows when to engage additional resources for support
* Understands available support systems and understand how they can help
* Ability to collaborate with others in order to solve problems and achieve results
* Treats peers with respect and accepts individual differences
* Keeps people informed and facilitates conflict resolution
* Encourages peers to fully participate

Ethics and Reliability

* High regard for emotional and physical safety of peer while ensuring confidentiality is protected and ensures all interactions are intended to achieve the emotional and physical safety
* Demonstrates unconditional respect for their peer, their time and their needs
* Commits to ongoing learning and personal development to fulfill their role as a peer supporter

## Peer Support Team Member Knowledge and Training

The following outlines basic training that should be provided to your peer support team members. Here are some steps that you should take to prepare to provide your peer support team members the training that they need to be effective.

* Identify the specific needs of your peer support team based on the competencies above and/or the suggested training content below
* Identify the desired outcomes of the peer support training program
* Identify which content is specific to your organization and which is more generic
* Identify potential training providers
* Review available training programs to identify which aspects are covered by the training provider and which aspects need to be developed
* Identify what additional training content needs to be developed
* Determine the best delivery mode for the training
* Plan training program schedule and communicate with training course participants
* Provide training and implement program
* Evaluate the program, is it achieving the desired results

### Peer Support Training Topics

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| **Psychological First Aid and Peer Support Team Roles and Responsibilities** | **Communication, Facilitation and Decision Making Skills** |
| * Organizations peer support program overview * Core competencies of peer support team member * Review Roles and Responsibilities of Peer Support Team members * Fundamentals of peer support – hope and recovery * Peer support values and ethics, understanding elements how the support program works and specific conduct * Negotiating limits and boundaries within a peer support relationship * Understanding recovery and resiliency * Understanding how a peers trauma can impact the peer support team member and possible signs and strategies for self-management * Protocols for when to seek additional support and follow organizational protocols * How to conduct a peer support meeting * Demonstrate peer support team skills such as de-escalation of crisis, communication skills | * Active listening, probing, paraphrasing and providing feedback * Conflict resolution * Ensuring the needs of the peer is being addressed * Goal setting * Understanding body language * Concepts and methods to promote peer to peer effectiveness * Using strategies to calm stressful situations * Identify and mitigate potential misunderstandings and/or barriers to communication * Strategies for creating an environment of trust * Using strategies to empower the peer to have increased power and control in their life * Building trust in relationships and supporting another person through change * Balancing effective strategies with authentic and empathetic listening * How to celebrate a peers progress or success |
| **Crisis Intervention** | **Anti-Stigma Practices** |
| * Understand available supports and organizational protocols * Understand how to recognize the severity of a crisis and follow necessary life-saving protocols * Support peer in a manner that ensures safety and help develop a plan and more hopeful outlook * How to explore options for community support * Suicide training and intervention * Mental health laws and human rights laws * How to collaborate with community supports and traditional care services | * Identifying and understanding types of stigma * Understand the effects of stigma and how to develop strategies to mitigate or recover * Understand the impacts of internalized stigma and how it may impact the peer support team member and developing strategies to mitigate * Recognize the impact of social exclusion on an individual and how to support peers steps towards participating in community * Understand the importance of, and approaches to, respecting diversity and cultural differences in peer support programs * Understand each individual has a unique perception of the world |