

Appendix A: Peer Support

Peer support is practiced in different places. Many activities can be part of peer support. Both people in the relationship have experience overcoming challenges. They also both have experience living with mental health, co-occurring or substance use conditions. This creates a relationship of sharing. They support each other's healing and growth. It does not focus on deficits. Peer support does not replace needed treatment. It is rooted in kindness and respect for a person's skills, hopes, and dreams. The person and what matters to them are important. Peer support emphasizes strengths. Developing coping skills is a key part, too. Peer support also focuses on creating valued social roles in communities.

Elements of Peer Support include:

- 1. Role of the Peer Supporter:** The peer supporter is part of a person's care team.
 - ▶ Peer supporters help an individual communicate their needs and preferences to clinical providers. They help individuals understand their rights. They also help them advocate for their preferences.
 - ▶ They help the person understand their illness. They help the person understand the treatments they are receiving. They also help them access services that may be helpful.
 - ▶ The peer supporter will clearly explain to the person what services and supports they can offer. Their role has limits. They do not conduct therapy. They do not diagnose. Peer supporters are ethically bound to maintain the person's safety if they disclose plans to harm themselves or others.
- 2. Peer Supporters use Strengths-Based Approaches:** Peer supporters help the person see their own abilities to cope with, and overcome, personal challenges. Then the peer supporter helps the person build on these abilities. They help the person identify and use "people, places, and things." These can help them reach their goals. Peer supporters can use their own experience to encourage hope that recovery is possible. Peer supports help people comply with and complete their treatments.
- 3. Peer Supporters are Community-Based:** Effective peer support engages people in valued roles in the community. It promotes people taking part in community activities. Peer support helps people participate in their community. This lets them give back to their communities.

Recovery Support & Goal Advocate

The strengths of a peer supporter are their lived experience and understanding that recovery is an ongoing process. The peer supporter instills hope that recovery is possible. They can personally relate to the challenges of living with mental health conditions. Peer supporters also:

- ▶ Help people understand and use a complex system of care;
- ▶ Help people "find their voice" so they can communicate their preferences;
- ▶ Help people know the costs and benefits of different choices;
- ▶ Support people in their choices. This is even if the peer supporter would make different choices.
- ▶ Respect people's dignity and need for confidentiality.

Refer to the Self Advocacy section of this toolkit. You may choose to have someone attend a care planning meeting with you. They can help you advocate and support your choices. Peer supporters can help you prepare for a treatment planning meeting using some of this Toolkit's resources. This is so that your priorities are considered. If a peer supporter goes to your treatment planning meeting with you, you must still speak up. Remember, the peer supporter does not speak for you.

Peer Support Technical Assistance Centers

Peers for Progress

Peers for Progress promotes peer support as a key part of health, health care, and prevention. People need practical, social, and emotional support. This lets them manage and maintain good health behaviors. Individuals with similar experiences can be great sources of support for each other.

The Peers for Progress website has a Tools & Training page for background and research on Peer Support.

Website: peersforprogress.org

NAMI Peer-to-Peer program

The NAMI Peer-to-Peer program is a recovery-focused educational program for adults. It helps establish and maintain wellness in response to mental health challenges. The course (ten two-hour sessions) provides key information and strategies related to living with mental illness.

Website: www.nami.org

InterNational Association of Peer Supporters (iNAPS)

The InterNational Association of Peer Supporters, Inc. (iNAPS, formerly the National Association of Peer Specialists), is a private, non-profit group. It promotes peer support in mental health, co-occurring and substance use treatment systems.

Website: inaops.org