

Peer Support: Lived Expertise in Action



What is Peer Support?

Peer support is a strengths-based approach where individuals with lived experience of substance use, mental health challenges, or recovery provide guidance, encouragement, and practical assistance to others on similar journeys. It is built on mutuality, shared understanding, and trust.

Core Principles of Peer Support

- **Lived Experience as Expertise:** Peers use their personal recovery journeys to build authentic connections.
- **Mutuality & Shared Power:** The relationship is collaborative—not hierarchical.
- **Hope & Empowerment:** Peers inspire hope by showing recovery is possible in many forms.
- **Choice & Self-Determination:** Individuals define their own goals, pathways, and pace.
- **Respect & Dignity:** Peers validate experiences and uphold person-centered, nonjudgmental support.

Role of a Peer Specialist

Peer support specialists may:

- Offer emotional support and active listening
- Model recovery and coping strategies
- Assist with navigation of resources and services
- Provide harm reduction information
- Support goal-setting and problem-solving
- Advocate alongside individuals in care settings
- Promote engagement in treatment, recovery, or community programs

What a Peer Specialist is NOT

Peer support specialists do **not**:

- Provide clinical diagnoses or therapy
- Make decisions for the individual
- Replace counselors, clinicians, or case managers
- Pressure individuals to choose a specific recovery path



OPIOID LEARNING
AND RESPONSE
COLLABORATIVE

Benefits of Peer Support

Evidence shows peer support can lead to:

- Increased engagement in services
- Improved self-efficacy and empowerment
- Reduced substance use and mental health symptoms
- Lower hospitalizations and crisis episodes
- Stronger social connectedness and recovery capital
- Enhanced cultural responsiveness and trust in care systems



Types of Peer Support

- **Recovery Coaching:** Focuses on substance use recovery, goal planning, and community-based support.
- **Certified Peer Support Specialists (CPSS), Certified Recovery Support Specialists (CRSS), and Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists (CPRS):** Trained providers offering structured, ongoing support.
- **Peer Navigators:** Assist individuals in accessing services, care, and benefits.
- **Youth/Family Peers:** Support youth or families from shared experience perspectives.
- **Community & Mutual Aid Groups:** Includes 12-step programs, SMART Recovery, recovery community organizations, and more.

Key Competencies for Peer Specialists

- Effective communication
- Boundaries & ethics
- Cultural humility
- Trauma-informed practice
- Advocacy skills
- Documentation (when required)
- Crisis response & de-escalation (within scope)

Why Peer Support Matters

Peers help bridge the gap between systems and individuals. They reduce stigma, strengthen trust, and create pathways to healing that honor culture, autonomy, and personal journeys. Peer support is an essential component of a comprehensive, person-centered behavioral health system.



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