

The eight core principles of peer support

These principles describe the core philosophy and values of peer support. It will help to keep developing your understanding of these as you progress in the role.

<p>Mutual</p> <p>A relationship based on shared experience, empathy, authenticity and respect</p>	<p>The experience of peers who give and gain support can never be identical. However, peer workers in mental health settings share some of the experiences of the people they work with. They have an understanding of the experience of mental health challenges, the meaning of being defined as a ‘mental patient’ in our society and the confusion, loneliness, fear, helplessness and hopelessness that can ensue.</p>
<p>Reciprocal</p> <p>All contribute to and gain from the relationship in a shared process of problem solving</p>	<p>Traditional relationships between mental health professionals and the people they support are founded on the assumption of an expert (professional) and a non-expert (patient/client). Mental health professionals define the reality of those whom they serve within a range of different theories; this obviates the possibility of reciprocity. Peer relationships involve no claims to such special expertise but involve a sharing and exploration of different world views and the generation of solutions together.</p>
<p>Non-directive</p> <p>Within a peer relationship one person does not prescribe what is “good for” the other</p>	<p>Because of their claims to special knowledge, mental health professionals prescribe the ‘best’ course of action for those whom they serve. Peer support is not about introducing another set of experts who offer prescriptions based on their own experience - ‘you should try this because it worked for me’. Instead, they help people to recognise their own resources and seek their own solutions</p>
<p>Recovery focused</p> <p>The relationship focuses on helping people to grow within and beyond what has happened</p>	<p>Peer support engages in Recovery focused relationships by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspiring HOPE. Peers embody Recovery and offer images of possibility. They are in a position to say ‘I know you can do it’ and generate personal belief, energy and commitment with the person they are supporting. • Sharing practical strategies and techniques to manage personal challenges and so help the person they are supporting to take back CONTROL of their personal challenges and define their own destiny. • Facilitating access to OPPORTUNITIES that the person values and enabling them to participate in roles, relationships and activities in the communities of their choice.

<p>Strengths based</p> <p>It recognises people's courage, strengths and skills and how they can use these to pursue their dreams</p>	<p>Peer support involves a relationship that is not afraid of extreme emotions (whether these are of anger, despair, fear ...) and is about being with someone in their distress. But it is also about seeing within that distress the seeds of possibility and creating a fertile ground in which the person can grow. It explores what a person has gained from their experience, seeks out qualities and assets, identifies hidden achievements and celebrates what seem like the smallest steps forward.</p>
<p>Inclusive</p> <p>Peers help people engage with and contribute to their communities</p>	<p>Being a 'peer' is not just about having mental health challenges, but understanding the meaning of such experiences within the communities of which the person is a part. This can be critical among those who feel marginalised and misunderstood by traditional services¹. Someone who knows the language, values and nuances of those communities has an understanding of the resources and possibilities within those communities. This equips them to help others become a valued member of their community.</p>
<p>Progressive</p> <p>A shared journey of learning and growing together</p>	<p>Peer support is not a static friendship but progressive mutual support in a shared journey of discovery; not just a buddy but a travelling companion with both learning new skills, developing new resources and reframing challenges as opportunities for finding new solutions.</p>
<p>Safe</p> <p>Feeling able to express ourselves freely in a supportive relationship, where everyone feels safe</p>	<p>Supportive peer relationships involve the negotiation of what safety means to both parties in terms of emotional safety. This can be achieved by discovering what makes each other feel unsafe, sharing rules of confidentiality, demonstrating compassion, authenticity and a non-judgemental attitude and acknowledging that neither of you have all the answers.</p>

¹ Davidson et al, 2012; Faulkner and Kalathil, 2012; Mental Health Foundation, 2012



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