

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PEER SUPPORT SERVICES

➤ PRACTICE GUIDELINES QUICK GUIDE ➤

WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT?

Activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences related to the recovery process with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, or both. Support is provided through “shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment.”¹

It can include advocacy, linkage to resources, sharing of experience, community and relationship building, group facilitation, skill building, mentoring, goal setting, and more.²



WHO PROVIDES PEER SUPPORT?



Peer Support Specialists (PSS) - Individuals that self-identify as having lived experience with the process of recovery from mental illness, substance use disorder or both, either as a consumer of these services or as the parent or family member of the consumer, that use that lived experience plus skills learned in formal training.³

They are expected to be willing to share their experience, have a strong dedication to recovery and successfully complete the training requirements.³

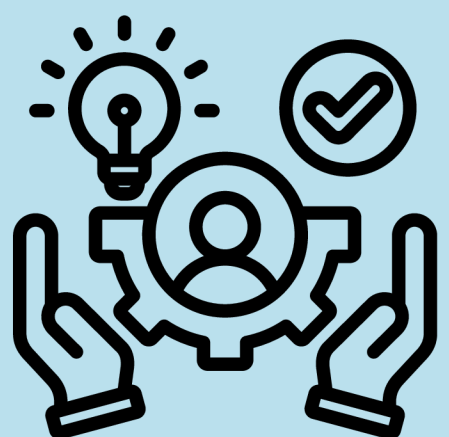
The key difference from other providers is the ability to draw from lived experience and experiential knowledge.

17 PEER SUPPORT CORE COMPETENCIES

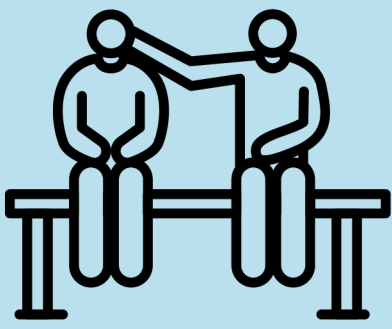
Following 17 core competencies established by the State of California are set of knowledge, skills and attitudes a person needs to successfully perform peer support roles.⁴

- The concepts of hope, recovery, and wellness
- The role of advocacy
- The role of consumers and family members
- Psychiatric rehabilitation skills and service delivery, and addiction recovery principles, including defined practices
- Cultural and structural competence trainings
- Trauma-informed care
- Group facilitation skills
- Self-awareness and self-care
- Co-occurring disorders of mental health and substance use
- Conflict resolution
- Professional boundaries and ethics
- Preparation for employment opportunities, including study and test-taking skills, application and résumé preparation, interviewing, and other potential requirements for employment
- Safety and crisis planning
- Navigation of, and referral to, other services
- Documentation skills and standards
- Confidentiality
- Digital literacy

See full practice guidelines for key skills, attitudes, approaches and examples for each competency



TYPES OF PEER SOCIAL SUPPORT



Recovery is facilitated by social support, and peer support specialists are uniquely positioned to provide these four key types of social support as part of peer support services:⁵

- Emotional - demonstrate empathy, caring, or concern to bolster person's self-esteem and confidence (e.g., peer mentoring, peer-led support groups)
- Informational - share knowledge and information and/or provide life or vocational skills training (e.g., parenting class, job readiness training)
- Instrumental - provide concrete assistance to help others accomplish tasks (e.g., transportation, help accessing health and social services)
- Affiliational - facilitate contacts with other people to promote learning of social and recreational skills, create community, and acquire a sense of belonging (e.g., wellness recovery centers, sports league participation)

WHAT PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS SHOULD/SHOULD NOT DO



What PSS Should Do⁶

- Serve as role models
- provide support throughout the continuum (onset, early intervention, long-term recovery, acute, crisis)
- Help with goal setting and wellness planning
- Make connections with other services and supports

What PSS Should **NOT** Do⁶

- Act as sponsor, therapist, or clinician
- Assess, diagnose, or treat an individual
- Influence individuals towards medication or treatment they do not want
- Assimilate into other roles



BE AWARE OF: PEER DRIFT

Peer drift happens when role of peer support specialists begin to deviate from the practices that distinguish peer support specialists from other providers. It can include being asked to do tasks that do not align with their role and scope, and can result in approaches and characteristics that tend to be more clinical in nature or more informal and casual in nature. To avoid peer drift, peer support specialists should work with and be supervised by staff who are familiar with peer support role and services.⁷



Strong Peer Identity

- Comfort using recovery story as a tool
- Self-confidence, security and pride about identifying as PSS
- Peer support relationship as an opportunity for mutual learning experience
- Focus on strengths, skills and opportunities
- Keep interactions simple, authentic and real
- Advocate for clients to find their own voices, make self-determined choices and take calculated risks in service of recovery and attainment of goals

Peer Drift

- Discomfort using recovery story as a tool
- Self-doubt, insecurity and shame about identifying as PSS
- Peer support relationship as an opportunity for expert instruction
- Focus on problems, barriers, symptoms and diagnoses
- Distant interactional style that focuses on more professional and objective standards
- Encourage compliance with professional advice, defer decisions to others, avoid challenging situations

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (n.d.). Peer Support Workers for those in Recovery. <https://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs/recovery-support-tools/peers>

2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2015). Core competencies for peer workers in behavioral health services. https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tacs/core-competencies_508_12_13_18.pdf

3. Mental Health Services: Peer Support Specialist Certification, Cal. S. (2020), Chapter 150 (Cal. Stat. 2020).

4. California Mental Health Services Authority (2022). Training Curriculum - General Peer Specialist Core Competencies. <https://www.capecertification.org/landscape-analysis-peer-certification-training-curriculum/>

5. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2009). What are peer recovery support services? <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma09-4454.pdf>

6. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2022). Peer Support Services in Crisis Care. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep22-06-04-001.pdf>

7. Chinman, M., Henze, K., and Sweeney, P. (2012). Peer Specialist Toolkit: Implementing Peer Support Services in VHA. https://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn4/docs/peer_specialist_toolkit_final.pdf