

## CORE COMPETENCIES

- 1. Peer support values and orientation:** Peer support providers understand the history of peer support and the peer support movement; relevant human rights and social justice issues; individuals' stories; peer support values and why they are important; differences between traditional mental health care and peer support; and the importance of peer support relationships that support self-determination, can hold multiple truths and are free of judgment and hierarchy.
- 2. Lived Experience:** Peer support providers are thoughtful in telling their personal stories. They share their lived experience when it is useful to the relationship, along with the skills and tools they have developed based on their own experience. They invite mutual sharing and endeavor to create meaningful connections with those they support. Over time, the relationship becomes mutually inspiring and supportive, as well as a template for creating similar relationships with others.
- 3. Awareness of Self and Others:** Peer support providers build a capacity for introspection and self-reflection. They can voice their own discomfort and needs, while staying open to the discomfort and needs of others. Peer support providers endeavor to maintain a multi-dimensional awareness that includes themselves and their own needs; others and the needs of others; and the relationship and the needs of the relationship as it develops between the peer support worker and others.
- 4. Boundaries:** Peer support providers invite frank discussions about personal needs and boundaries. They are clear about their personal limits, and they invite others to explore their own. They recognize that personal limits and boundaries are complex and can be physical, emotional, sexual, verbal and/or energetic. They negotiate boundaries, consistent with the needs and values of everyone involved. They understand that the way boundaries are negotiated and/or applied affects both internal and relational dynamics. Peer support providers are alert to signs of overwhelm, burn out, pushed buttons and trauma re-enactment. They address this openly and frankly when it occurs and seek support as needed. They encourage others to do the same when the peer support relationship is under stress.
- 5. Worldview and cultural awareness:** Peer support providers are aware that everyone has their own values, beliefs, cultural experiences, familial influences and relationships which create a personal worldview. They are aware of their own worldview and how it influences their individual attitudes, biases and judgments. They openly acknowledge that their personal worldview is the lens through which they currently experience reality. Peer support providers use their personal understanding of worldview to create connection, relationship and growth. They are open to the ideas, experiences and viewpoints of others, including to being changed by them. They endeavor to hold multiple truths and embrace the span of human diversity in a non-judgmental and compassionate manner. They negotiate worldview differences that affect the relationship openly and transparently, consulting others for assistance when necessary.

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6. **Communication.** Peer support providers understand that much of what is “said” between human beings is expressed indirectly (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, body language, tone of voice) or is impacted by the speaker's assumptions about what it is culturally appropriate to say. Peer support providers actively listen for what isn't being said (untold story). Peer support providers listen for commonalities and shared interests that can be built upon. Peer support providers allow for free-flowing, mutual conversations. When conflict arises, peer support workers explain their own needs, the needs of the job or organization and the limitations of their peer support role. Peer support providers are reflective and transparent in what they share and how they respond. They engage, network, collaborate and seek outside assistance as needed to care for the relationship.
7. **Authentic and mutual relationships:** Peer support providers are honest with themselves and genuine in their relationships with others. They acknowledge the relative power, privilege and status between service providers and service recipients, as well as between employees and participants at an organization.
8. **Self-determination:** Peer support providers focus on learning, exploring and growing together rather than on helping. They validate, encourage and support individuals to determine what they wish their lives to be.
9. **Trauma-informed:** Peer support providers understand the impact of personal history and trauma on human experience and functioning. Peer support providers understand that challenging behaviors (e.g., violence, substance use, anger) may result from trauma or learned patterns that have aided coping or survival. Peer support providers refrain from judging or resorting to labels, asking “What happened to you?” rather than “What is wrong with you?” Peer support workers appreciate crisis as an opportunity to grow and change.
10. **Safety:** Peer support providers view safety as something that results from relational connection and mutual trust. Peer support providers approach challenging situations that present a risk of harm to self or others from a perspective of relational care. They work collaboratively with those involved to address mutual distress and reactivity and any concerns that may arise for one or more parties. They negotiate around “risk-sharing” and endeavor to create solutions that are mutually acceptable to all concerned.
11. **Collaboration and teamwork:** Peer support providers use the same relational skills and practices to develop effective working relationships with team members, professional colleagues and other organizations, including policy makers and funders. They look for and establish connection based on shared interests and concerns. They explore worldview and acknowledge multiple truths. They seek to negotiate mutual, win-win solutions that address the needs, values and core concerns of everyone involved. When conflicts arise between the needs of the program or organization and those it serves, peer support providers openly acknowledge the conflict and seek to negotiate such conflict through thoughtful, mutually respectful dialogue. Peer support providers clarify the limits of their authority and seek assistance from others when needed.
12. **Links to resources, services, and supports:** Peer support providers journey with others in their efforts to obtain the resources, services and supports they need within mental health and community settings and beyond. Peer support providers share knowledge about available resources, continually develop their knowledge of available resources, and understand when and to whom to reach out for assistance.

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13. **Human Rights, Social Justice, and Advocacy:** Peer support providers appreciate the importance of human rights and social justice to mental, physical and social well-being. Peer support providers understand that various forms of oppression (racism, sexism, ableism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, etc.) are embedded in institutions, including the mental health system. They are alert to discrimination and oppression and listen carefully when others raise these issues. They endeavor to negotiate power imbalances and redress unfairness in a relational manner. They respect the right of individuals to receive services and supports of their choosing. They advocate with those who are advocating to receive such services and supports within communities of their choosing.
14. **Medicaid/Insurance- related Requirements:** Peer support providers in programs receiving insurance reimbursement, including Medicare and Medicaid, understand requirements of those programs and are transparent and open with those they serve about such requirements. Where documentation is required, peer support providers are able to document collaboratively.
15. **Understand the Peer Support Code of Ethics:** Peer support providers understand their responsibilities under the Peer Support Code of Ethics. They know, and can articulate, how the ethics that pertain to peer workers are different from those that apply to other providers within the state mental health system.
16. **Privacy:** Peer support providers honor the privacy and confidentiality of individuals, embrace peer support values and follow the law regarding the sharing and disclosure of confidential or protected information.
17. **Facilitate Change:** Peer support providers facilitate self-directed, autonomous, at-one's-own-pace change within themselves and with others. Peer support providers facilitate institutional, and systems change to move institutions and systems towards trauma-informed, healing-centered care that treats those with trauma histories, substance use and/or mental health challenges as human beings worthy of dignity and respect.