

CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN PEER SUPPORT

The Relationship to Lived Experience Spectrum

**Support
House**



Centre for
Innovation in
Peer Support

1-833-845-WELL (9355) Ext 390

supporthouse.ca

centreinfo@supporthouse.ca

Centre for Innovation in Peer Support (Centre) is embedded in Support House. The Centre promotes & facilitates the meaningful engagement, empowerment and enhanced capacities of people with lived experience and families, as well as effective peer support services regionally, provincially, nationally and internationally. Copyright 2022© by Support House and Centre for Innovation in Peer Support. All rights reserved worldwide. This resource may be freely reproduced and distributed. Citation of the source is required under copyright law.

How to Use This Resource

To Cite this Document

You may with proper citing share resources within this document for your own purposes. Please use the following citation when referencing or using any materials from this document:

Gremmen, A., & Hopkins, E. (2022). *The Relationship to Lived Experience Spectrum*. Support House: Centre for Innovation in Peer Support.

Legal

The views represented herein solely represent the views of the Centre for Innovation in Peer Support. Information in this document should not replace your own research and due diligence. The information used to create this resource draws on the experience of the Centre and public sources, referenced throughout. The materials in this resource are general guidelines only. This resource is not intended to provide legal advice. If there is a discrepancy between this document and any applicable legislation, the legislation will always prevail.

Acknowledgements

Authors
<p>Ethan Hopkins, Peer Integration & Systems Support, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support</p> <p>Alyssa Gremmen, Peer Integration & Systems Lead, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support</p>
Content Reviewers
<p>Richard Adair, Manager, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support</p> <p>Betty-Lou Kristy, Director, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support</p>
Branding Coordinator
<p>Lisa McVey, Communications & Marketing Coordinator, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support</p>

If you have questions about this resource, please contact
centreinfo@supporthouse.ca | www.supporthouse.ca

About the Centre

The Centre for Innovation in Peer Support provides both direct service and system focused supports across Ontario. The Centre for Innovation in Peer Support team has a robust expertise in the application of the *Guiding Standards of Peer Support*.

The Centre has been recognized as a “benchmark of excellence” in peer support, and meaningful co-design and engagement of people with lived/living experience and family & caregivers.

The Centre’s Focus: Professional Peer Support

The Centre focuses on providing, and supporting the practice of *professional peer support*.

The practice of professional peer support is emotional, social and/or practical support delivered by mutual agreement by persons who self-identify as having lived/living with similar circumstances and/or challenges. Professional peer support workers have engaged in training and skill development to enhance their ability to support empowering and empathetic relationships with others in their pursuit of self-determined wellness and/or change (Hopkins & Gremmen, 2022).

Professional peer support is when those with personal lived/living experiences work or volunteer in designated roles in mainstream/traditional services while ensuring that the critical aspects of hopefulness, recovery-orientation, empowerment, non-judgmental acceptance, and trust are promoted within the peer support relationship. Professional peer support is an intentional service provided where there is an identifiable ‘giver’ and ‘receiver’ of care. Professional peer support workers uphold the fidelity of peer support, while also honouring the responsibilities of their workplace (Hopkins & Gremmen, 2022).

[For more information on professional peer support, we invite you to read *Understanding Peer Support: A Proposed Core Service in Ontario* on our Resource Hub](#)

Supporting Provincial Systems & Partners

The **Centre’s Provincial, Systems & Partner** stream works within the mental health and substance use/addictions system to support peer staff, supervisors, and organizations from the approach of the *Guiding Standards of Peer Support* with a focus on professional peer support. The Centre also supports organisations to empower people with lived experience and/or family/caregiver experience through meaningful engagement and co-design.

Our full programming is offered through our **Virtual Learning Centre & Resource Hub** which supports the most current, best practices in Peer Support. Through our **Virtual Learning Centre**, we offer trainings, consultation, our peer professional development webinars, and provincial communities of practice. Our **Resource Hub** is home to our toolkits, models, and resources. All of these offerings support the implementation and practice of peer support within Ontario.

We continue to evolve, listening to input from our stakeholders across the province to identify gaps and needs within the system, and using quality improvement processes to pivot, pilot, evaluate and then scale and spread new innovations in peer support.

Supporting People Engaging in Services

The **Centre's Peer Programming** stream began as a consumer survivor initiative under the name TEACH (Teach, Empower, Advocate for Community Health) in 1999. TEACH later came to be housed at Support & Housing Halton (now Support House) and continued to evolve in order to meet the needs of our community, eventually amalgamating with Support House's peer support provincial systems & partner support program, the Centre for Innovation in Peer Support.

Today, the Centre's Peer Programming utilizes its expertise from having provided peer support services for over 23 years in the Halton-Mississauga region to offer quality programs that are designed, developed, implemented, and evaluated by people with lived experience. This stream is focused on peer-led psychosocial and rehabilitative programming. Together, we build community and connection through creating safe spaces to heal and grow for people navigating mental health and substance use/addiction challenges, as well as supporters/families.

Our History

In 2014, the Mississauga Halton LHIN Mental Health & Addictions Leadership Table began discussing future funding priorities. Peer support was identified as the main priority. After consultations and research, the Mississauga Halton LHIN created the Enhancing and Sustaining Peer Support Initiative in 2015. This initiative created peer support positions, supported service coordination, and supported the training and development of these positions across the region.

Support & Housing Halton (now Support House) became the lead agency that hired and housed the Peer Support Systems Lead and the Substance Use & Provincial Systems Lead in a program that would become the Centre for Innovation in Peer Support (Centre). This team worked to sustain the new peer support positions that had been funded, build infrastructure, and bridge the many stakeholders impacted by this initiative.

In January of 2020, the Centre amalgamated with Support House's direct-service-facing peer support program, TEACH. The Centre now has a direct service stream of peer support programming as well as a system and partners stream, which has grown beyond the Mississauga/Halton area to include the entire province of Ontario.

About Support House:

Support House is directed by our core values. They guide our agency's decisions and actions, unite our staff, define our brand, and inspire our culture. We put people first – our supports are **person directed**. We **connect and engage** and start conversations to build and maintain relationships. We focus on **health and wellness** practices to inspire our culture. All employees are required to adhere to our values-based Oath of conduct.

Relationship to Lived Experience Spectrum

The “Relationship to Lived Experience Spectrum” was created by Ethan Hopkins and Alyssa Gremmen at the Centre for Innovation in Peer Support (2022).

We have relationships with our various lived experiences. Our relationship to these experiences includes how we feel about and understand our journey; and this influences our thoughts, actions, our relationships with others and our relationship to systems. These thoughts, actions and relationships are important in peer support and experience-based advisory work.

The *Relationship to Lived Experience Spectrum* is not a measurement of time, but rather a reflection tool for better understanding the relationship between people and their experiences. Our experiences make up a large amount of our expertise. When we are connected to our experiences, this expertise can lead to supportive relationships with ourselves, others and systems to create positive change. When used ineffectively, we can do harm to ourselves and others and create minimal change.

CONSUMED BY EXPERIENCES	CONNECTED TO EXPERIENCES	REMOVED FROM EXPERIENCES
Sharing Experiences		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over-shares from lived experiences Shares Misery Stories from a place of misery or anger. Shares for the purpose of receiving support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selectively discloses from lived experiences when of benefit to others Shares Resilience Stories that focus on impact, learning, actions & supports from their journey in a meaningful way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under-shares from lived experiences Shares Glory Stories from a place of status or glorification. Unable to meaningfully use their past experiences
Engaging with Others		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easily triggered/upset by others' sharing Focuses on themselves instead of others Blames/Shames others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports themselves through difficult conversations Focuses on the wellbeing of others Holds others with high regard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less likely to empathize with others' experiences Focuses on themselves instead of others Blames/Shames others
Creating Change		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unwilling to collaborate with systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborates with systems to bring positive change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upholds status quo of systems

Sharing Experiences

CONSUMED BY EXPERIENCES	CONNECTED TO EXPERIENCES	REMOVED FROM EXPERIENCES
Sharing Experiences		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over-shares from lived experiences Shares Misery Stories from a place of misery or anger. Shares for the purpose of receiving support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selectively discloses from lived experiences when of benefit to others Shares Resilience Stories that focus on impact, learning, actions & supports from their journey in a meaningful way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under-shares from lived experiences Shares Glory Stories from a place of status or glorification. Unable to meaningfully use their past experiences

Connected to Experiences

When we are connected to our experiences, we intentionally share parts of our personal lived/living experiences in a way that is meaningful to others. This means we share to support compassionate understanding, inspire hope, provide validation and support exploration of challenges and solutions.

These **Resilience Stories** address the pain or struggle of an experience but focus on the impact of our experiences, the learnings we've had, the actions we took and supports we found helpful. Resilience stories are brief, as the interaction is not about us, but rather to be of support to others.

Consumed by Experiences

When we are consumed by our experiences we may overshare from our journey, rather than intentionally sharing parts of our journey that are of support to others.

These **Misery Stories** focus on pain or struggle. Sharing misery stories means we stay in sorrow and we may overshare details of experiences causing vicarious trauma or re-traumatization for ourselves and others, ultimately causing harm.

Removed from Experiences

When we are removed from our journey, we may be unable to meaningfully use our lived experiences when they could be of support, or share very little.

These **Glory Stories** are shared from a place of status or glorification, only focusing on positives, often accompanied by minimal vulnerability. Sharing glory stories creates shame, comparison, and they can be dismissive and prescriptive, ultimately causing harm (I.e., "You just need to work hard").

RESOURCE HIGHLIGHT:
DEVELOPING YOUR RESILIENCE STORIES

[Visit our Resource Hub to explore how you can develop your resilience stories](#)

Skillfully Sharing

Trauma & Harm

AVOID: Sharing details about: self-harm actions, suicide plans, violent actions, traumatic event details, drug use rituals, abuse details. Glorifying, comparing or reminiscing on these topics.

DO: Acknowledge the experience then discuss impacts, learnings etc. and then openly share about feelings, meanings, thoughts, impacts, learning etc.

Example: “I used to self-harm too, it helped me cope with things and gave me a sense of control, something I felt I had very little of at the time. I learned new coping strategies and slowly I was able to stop self-harming.”

Medication

AVOID: Sharing about specifics (dosages, names etc.), medical advice, encouraging or discouraging medications.

DO: Remain neutral, medications are part of some people’s journey and work well, they may have side effects and journeys with medication are personal. We can support people to bring questions to their doctors should they want to know more about medication.

Example: “Medication and the process of finding the medications that work or don’t work is personal, it’s about finding the best fit for you. I know for some people medication has been part of their journey and for others it has not. You have the right to be curious and ask questions about your medication process if you would like to.”

Service Providers

AVOID: Sharing about specific positive or negative experiences with specific service providers, Encouraging or discouraging a service.

DO: Remain neutral. Experiences with services are personal. We can support people to explore options open to them, and explore the different offerings of a service. Be sure to support their self-determination and honour the experiences people have with different providers. We can support people to share their needs, their gratitude and their concerns with services they interact with.

Example: I have had both positive and negative experiences with services, sometimes you find a great fit, and sometimes it does not feel great. The experience with services is personal. If it fits for you that’s great, if it does not seem to fit there are options for services we can explore.

Engaging with Others

CONSUMED BY	CONNECTED TO EXPERIENCES	REMOVED FROM
Engaging with Others		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easily triggered/upset by others' sharing Focuses on themselves instead of others Blames/Shames others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports themselves through difficult conversations Focuses on the wellbeing of others Holds others with high regard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less likely to empathize with others' experiences Focuses on themselves instead of others Blames/Shames others

Connected to Experiences

When we are connected to our experiences, we are at a place with our journey that we can support ourselves through conversations with others that include difficult or triggering topics for us. While supporting ourselves, we are able to focus on the wellbeing of others. We are also able to hold others, and their journeys and/or perspectives with high regard.

Consumed by Experiences

When we are consumed by our experiences we can become easily triggered/upset by others' sharing when it touches on topics that intersect with our journey or topics, we find difficult to support ourselves through in general. We may have challenges focusing on the wellbeing of others. We may also shame or blame others, whether that is others sharing their journey and/or perspective with us or shaming and/or blaming professions that we interacted with along our journey.

Removed from Experiences

When we are removed from our journey, we may be less likely to empathize with others' experiences. No longer able to truly empathize, we may have challenges focusing on the wellbeing of others. We may also shame or blame others, removed from the day-to-day impacts of challenges we once faced we may be impatient and unempathetic towards others' challenges.

Creating Change

CONSUMED BY	CONNECTED TO EXPERIENCES	REMOVED FROM
Creating Change		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unwilling to collaborate with systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborates with systems to bring positive change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upholds status quo of systems

Connected to Experiences

When we are connected to our experiences, we are able to collaborate with governments, organizations, institutions, communities, and teams. Conversations with these groups may include service offerings, policies and best practices, raising awareness of peer support and advocating for the needs of those with lived/living experiences in a way that is professional, assertive, and respectful in order to bring positive change.

Consumed by Experiences

When we are consumed by our experiences we may be unwilling or unable to professionally, assertively, and respectfully collaborate with systems. We may find that the harm we have experienced within systems is still actively causing us distress, leaving us unable to hear others' perspectives and/or work together.

Removed from Experiences

When we are removed from our journey, we may uphold the status quo of systems. We may find that we rarely advocate for meaningful change and may disregard calls from others to create change.

Consumed or Removed from your Experiences?

Here are some next steps...

If you feel that you may be consumed or removed from your experiences then there are some next steps for you to consider in your journey.

Consumed by Experiences

- Practice holding others in high regard
- Engage in your own supports
- Engage in activities that support your wellness
- Reflect on the impact, learning, actions & supports from your journey
- Continue your lifelong learning
- Seek opportunities to learn from others
- Consider removing yourself from the position, if needed

Removed from Experiences

- Practice holding others in high regard
- Promote engagement/ co-design with those engaged with services
- Seek to understand others' truth
- Consider shifting roles & creating space for other people (I.e., Shifting your role from a Peer Supporter to a Support Coordinator, or from a lived experience advisor/board member to a different advisor/board member)
- Reconnect with your journey through self-reflection (re-connecting to the impact, learning, actions & supports from your journey)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's Provincial Systems Virtual Learning Centre & Resource Hub for Peer Supporters & Organizations

Support House's Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's full programming is offered through our Virtual Learning Centre & Resource Hub which supports the most current, best practices in Peer Support.

Through our Virtual Learning Centre, we offer trainings, consultation, our Peer Professional Development Webinar Series, and provincial communities of practice. Our Resource Hub is home to our educational toolkits, documents and videos. These offerings support the practice and implementation of Peer Support within Ontario.

Products on our Resource Hub:

- ***Guiding Standards of Peer Support*** (from Mental Health Commission of Canada, Peer Support Canada & Centre for Innovation in Peer Support)
- ***Developing Your Resilience Stories Toolkit***
- ***Peer Support Examining Bias Toolkit***
- ***Peer Staff Hiring Guidelines*** (available to organisation leaders upon request)

[CLICK HERE TO VISIT OUR VIRTUAL LEARNING CENTRE & RESOURCE HUB](#)

[CLICK HERE TO VISIT OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL](#)



1-833-845-WELL (9355) Ext 390

supporthouse.ca

centreinfo@supporthouse.ca