



CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN PEER SUPPORT

Guiding Standards of Peer Support

Mental Health Commission of Canada's Peer Support Values
Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's Values in Action
Peer Support Canada's Code of Conduct, Principles of Practice
and Peer Supporter Competencies

How to Use This Resource

Intent

The Centre for Innovation in Peer Support identifies five widely recognized guiding works as the *Guiding Standards of Peer Support*. Together they set the foundation, identify necessary competencies, guide professional boundaries and identify authentic, values-based, best practices that uphold the fidelity of peer support. These works have been compiled for ease of reference in this resource.

To Cite this Document

To share resources within this document, please use the citations provided below. We ask that you cite the individual works separately, rather than this document as a whole so that proper recognition is given to those who have contributed to these works. We have included citations for the works below for your ease of reference:

Values of Peer Support:

Sunderland, Kim, Mishkin, Wendy, Peer Leadership Group, Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). *Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support*. Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca>

Peer Support Values in Action:

Support House Centre for Innovation in Peer Support. (2017). *Peer Support Values in Action*

Code of Conduct:

Peer Support Canada (2024). *Peer Support Resources: Code of Conduct*. Retrieved from <https://peersupportcanada.ca/>

Principles of Practice:

Peer Support Canada (2024). *Principles of Practice*. In *Peer Support Canada, National Peer Supporter Certification Handbook* (p. 24).

Peer Supporter Competencies: Peer Support Canada (2024). *Peer Support Resources: Peer Supporter Competencies*. Retrieved from <https://peersupportcanada.ca/>

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.

About the Centre

Recognized provincially for its award-winning services, Support House Centre for Innovation in Peer Support (the Centre) has evolved into a "Benchmark of Excellence" in peer support and experience-based engagement and co-design. The Centre is dedicated to implementing innovative best practices for meaningful and equitable engagement and partnerships with individuals who have lived/living experience, as well as their family/caregivers, across Ontario.

Our History

Originally established as a Consumer Survivor Initiative in 1999 under the name TEACH (Teach, Empower, Advocate for Community Health), the need for support and training for agencies providing authentic peer support was identified. As a result, in 2015, the Centre received new base funding from the legacy Mississauga Halton LHIN to offer regional and provincial system support for Health Service Providers (HSPs). This support includes hospital psychiatric inpatient units, addiction residential treatment, supportive housing programs, central access, employment support programs, justice, community mental health and addiction providers, and self-help education and support groups. This scope has since expanded to encompass regional, provincial, national, and international collaborations.

Supporting People Engaging in Services

Our service offerings include wellness-based, peer-led self-help and social connection programs for community members. These programs are designed, developed, implemented, and evaluated by individuals with lived/living experience. We work together to foster community and connection by creating safe spaces where people navigating mental health and substance use/addiction challenges, can heal and grow.

Supporting Provincial Systems & Partners

The Centre's Provincial, Systems & Partner stream is continually evolving to support organizations that provide peer support services and to foster meaningful, equitable engagement, co-design, and partnership with individuals who have lived/living experience, as well as family/caregivers for roles on advisory tables, working groups, committees, and government boards. We create learning opportunities through co-design, education and training, consultations, capacity building, collaborations and partnerships, and the development of resources and toolkits, drawing on our expertise in engagement stewardship.

Additional learning resources are available in our Virtual Learning Centre and Resource Hub, where you can explore information about our provincial communities of practice, toolkits, models, and other resources. The Centre is committed to enhancing the capacity of individuals with lived/living experience, family/caregivers, peer support workers, supervisors, health service providers, and regional and provincial healthcare systems. We aspire to co-design and co-create an inclusive and equitable healthcare response, regardless of complexity.

About Support House

Support House is guided by our core values, which shape 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, starting 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.

Values of Peer Support



Mental Health Commission of Canada
Commission de la santé mentale du Canada

Hope and Recovery

Acknowledging the power of hope and the positive impact that comes from a recovery approach

Self-Determination

Having faith that each person intrinsically knows which path towards recovery is most suitable for them and their needs, noting that it is the peer's choice whether to become involved in a peer support relationship

Health & Wellness

Acknowledging all aspects of a healthy and full life

Empathetic & Equal Relationships

Noting that the peer support relationship and all involved can benefit from the reciprocity and better understanding that comes from a similar experience
(common threads of connection)

Dignity, Respect & Social Inclusion

Acknowledging the intrinsic worth of all individuals, whatever their background, preferences or situation

Integrity, Authenticity, & Trust,

Noting that confidentiality, reliability and ethical behaviour are honoured in each and every interaction

Lifelong Learning & Personal Growth

Acknowledging the value of learning, changing and developing new perspectives for all individuals

Sunderland, Kim, Mishkin, Wendy, Peer Leadership Group, Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support. Calgary, AB: Mental Health Commission of Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca>

[Want to learn more? Click here!](#)

Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2013). Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support.

Peer Support Values in Action

The Centre for Innovation in Peer Support recognizes that peer support is made up of values-based actions. Through a research process centered on the Mental Health Commission of Canada's Core Values of Peer Support, the Centre facilitated the creation of 17 action statements that reflected the expectations of people engaging in services of peer support workers. These statements were said to reflect the Values of Peer Support and were therefore seen as integral for peer support workers to practice in their work.

Collectively these statements are referred to as the Peer Support Values in Action.

It is an organization's role to support the peer worker to integrate and act on these values in action within their role.

These statements are validated and reliability tested, the items cannot be changed or altered.

- **The peer support worker** reminds me that my health and wellness is unique to me
- **The peer support worker** tells me about their experience in a way that is meaningful to me
- **The peer support worker** gives me encouragement
- **The peer support worker** shares information with me (e.g., community resources that are available, different learning opportunities)
- **The peer support worker** helps me explore options open to me when I have a decision to make
- **The peer support worker** does not express disapproval of me or the choices I make
- **The peer support worker** tells me they believe in me
- **The peer support worker** tells me my feelings and opinions are worthwhile
- **The peer support worker** genuinely listens to me
- **The peer support worker** follows through on commitments they make
- **The peer support worker** discusses confidentiality with me
- **The peer support worker** tells me that I am not alone in my experiences and struggles
- **The peer support worker** encourages me to do things for myself instead of doing things for me
- **The peer support worker** learns from me and I learn from them
- **The peer support worker** reminds me that I have the right to express my needs
- **The peer support worker** demonstrates ways they take care of themselves
- When I meet with others in a group, **the peer support worker** tells me that I can participate in a way that is comfortable for me and the group

Code of Conduct



As Certified Peer Supporters we adhere to the following Code of Conduct:

- I will act ethically, according to the values and principles of peer support
- I will treat all people with respect and dignity
- I will respect human diversity and will foster non-discriminatory activities
- I will honour the rights, beliefs and personal values of individuals
- I will behave with honesty and integrity in providing support to peers
- I will respect the privacy of individuals and maintain confidentiality within the limitations of program policies and the law (e.g., potential harm to self or others)
- I will not knowingly expose a peer to harm
- I will not take advantage of the peer relationship for personal benefit, material or financial gain
- I will respect the boundaries of peer support work and will not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with the peers that I support
- I will not provide peer support in a manner that negatively affects the public's confidence in peer support

Principles of Practice



The Principles of Practice embody the character of the relationship and the philosophy of the work.

Peer supporters:

- Recognize the importance of an individual approach to recovery.
- Honour and respect where each individual is in their own unique journey of recovery recognizing that the focus is on the process and not just the end result.
- Facilitate the self-determination and the empowerment of peers to take an active role in their recovery and wellbeing.
- Recognize that the goals, values and beliefs of their peers may not be the same as their own.
- Are collaborative in building equal, open and trusting relationships with peers.
- Share their lived experiences in a manner that demonstrates compassionate understanding and inspires hope for recovery.
- Ensure that the knowledge gained from personal experience is used in a manner that contributes to the well-being of the peer and that the relationship is always peer-focused.
- Maintain mutually agreed upon limits and boundaries in the peer support relationship.
- Respect external limits and boundaries within the context of their role as a peer supporter.
- Practice self-care, monitor their own wellbeing and are aware of their own needs, as well as promote self-care for their peers.
- Play an active role in connecting peers to other resources and are open to seeking help when needed.
- Are collaborative with community partners, service providers and other stakeholders.
- Aspire to be current within their field of practice by remaining up-to-date regarding available resources, especially those that are locally available, and by engaging in continuous learning.

Peer Supporter Competencies



A certified peer supporter demonstrates skills and abilities within the following competencies:

1. Interpersonal Relations

Interacts in a manner that honours the dignity of others and strives to build positive respectful relationships. Strives to make others feel comfortable and conveys genuine interest in their peer. Even in a difficult or tense situation strives to maintain a level of respect and consideration for the other.

2. Demeanour

Is sensitive to what another might be feeling, demonstrates a capacity for non-judgmental empathy, and responds from an equal, genuine, and sharing point of view. Selectively self-discloses own experience in a manner that ensures the relationship remains peer focused.

3. Communication

Listens with empathy and without judgement, holding their peers in unconditional high regard. Uses communication styles and skills to improve understanding and adapts the style and tone of communication to suit the listener and the situation. Communicates using recovery language and emphasizes the strengths of their peers.

4. Critical Thinking

Engages in active listening skills to better understand a situation and recognizes that there is more than one way to look at an issue. Considers the possible implications or outcomes of their actions and, when asked, will help peers to explore the outcome or possible consequences of various options. Demonstrates good judgement in respecting the limits and boundaries of their role.

5. Hope

Operates from a sense of hope expressing confidence that others will be successful in their own personal journeys of recovery. Strives to model realistic optimism and a belief that even in difficult situations positive choices can be made.

6. Self-Management & Resiliency

Understands the importance of self-care and stress management and models the practices that work best for them to remain healthy while supporting others. Strives to maintain calm and diffuse stressful or challenging situations.

Peer Supporter Competencies



Peer Support Canada

7. Flexibility & Adaptability

Is open to new ideas, deals comfortably with ambiguity, and adjusts plans or behaviours to better suit a given situation. Is willing to be open-minded and compromises when needed.

8. Self-Awareness & Confidence

Interacts in a manner that demonstrates a balance of self-confidence with openness to the thoughts and opinions of others. Self-reflects and understands that personal thoughts and attitudes can influence their behaviour and actions.

9. Initiative & Commitment

Is dependable and carries tasks through to completion. Demonstrates good judgement knowing when insight or assistance should be requested from another and is trustworthy when working independently.

10. Teamwork

Shares knowledge, ideas and resources with team members in a cooperative and collaborative manner. Strives to fulfill their role and responsibility within the team while respecting the roles and responsibilities of the other team members.

11. Continuous Learning & Development

Strives to approach life and work in a curious manner, identifies areas where personal growth may be helpful, and takes advantage of opportunities to learn and develop. Recognizes the value of on-going personal growth and skill development and maintains a connection with a peer support community as a resource to stay 'grounded' in the work of authentic peer support.