



CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN PEER SUPPORT
**Supporting Our Wellness in the
Workplace**

How to Use This Resource

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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 this Resource

We would like to acknowledge that this resource has been created by Peer Supporters working in the mental health and addiction field, who have lived experience with mental illness and/or substance use.

We recognize that the realm of mental health and addiction support intersects with all parts of identity and experience. We encourage you to seek out learning and growth opportunities that can inform your language and practice regarding these intersections.

We also recognize that language is powerful and personal. This resource is not intended to bring shame or blame, but to raise awareness and different perspectives to members of helping professions, community and media. We hope this resource helps others in reducing stigma, prejudice, discrimination, and harm. Everyone has a role to play in this effort.

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

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.

Understanding Wellness in the Workplace

“Workplaces can play an essential part in maintaining positive mental health. They can give people the opportunity to feel productive and be a strong contributor to employee wellbeing. Yet it can also be a stressful environment that contributes to the rise of mental health [concerns]” (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2024).

The National Wellness Institute provides the following definitions of wellness:

1. An active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, a more successful existence.
2. A conscious, self-directed, and evolving process of achieving full potential.
3. Multidimensional and holistic, encompassing lifestyle, mental and spiritual well-being, and the environment.

Stoewen (2017) also offers that wellness is “A holistic integration of physical, mental and spiritual well-being, fueling the body, engaging the mind, and nurturing the spirit.”

The key themes of these definitions posit wellness as a conscious, active, multi-dimensional and holistic process. It is important to consider what wellness means to you so that you can use this knowledge to determine what you need to sustain your wellness in the workplace.

The Process of Wellness



The process of wellness begins with awareness that we are worthy of being and feeling well. From here we can explore what we need for this to happen. We may ask ourselves:

- What fills my cup? What restores me when I feel drained?

- What can I do proactively to keep myself feeling well (especially if I know I have to do something that will require a significant amount of my energy/ focus)?
- What do I want/ need to prioritize right now?
- Do I have the means to support myself based on the resources in my life in this moment? If this is not the case, are there external resources to which I can connect?

External resources can be formal (e.g., a community-based service offering) or informal (e.g., friends, family, neighbours, etc.). Building an awareness of the community supports around you may be beneficial. This knowledge of community resources can be shared with others as well.

When we have a better understanding of what we need, we can respond to those needs. The decisions we make and actions we take as we respond to the needs we identify for ourselves are both forms of self-care. Self-care will be in support of one or many dimensions of our wellness, which collectively contribute to overall wellbeing. There are many dimensions of wellness that have been identified. Some of them include physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, occupational, and environmental dimensions. These dimensions are interdependent, which has important implications.

The balance in one dimension of our wellness can influence other dimensions; neglect of any one dimension over time may adversely affect others and ultimately impact one's health and well-being just as positive shifts in one dimension can extend to others. This does not mean that everyone will have to attend to each dimension in the same way. Wellness is unique for everyone and individually defined.

Building an awareness of what wellness looks like for us and how we can support our needs around our wellness informs us as we establish harmony between the dimensions of wellness that feels most authentic and comfortable to us. We will naturally have our own priorities, approaches, and aspirations, including our own views of what it means to live life fully that will guide each of us throughout this process.

Dimensions of Wellness

(Sunderland et al., 2013; Stoewen, 2017).

The Mental Health Commission of Canada has identified these areas of wellness as important to understand in the training of peer workers:

Physical

- Caring for your body to stay healthy now and in the future

Intellectual

- Growing intellectually, maintaining curiosity about all there is to learn, valuing lifelong learning, and responding positively to intellectual challenges
- Expanding knowledge and skills while discovering the potential for sharing your gifts with others

Emotional

- Understanding and respecting your feelings, values, and attitudes
- Appreciating the feelings of others
- Managing your emotions in a constructive way
- Feeling positive and enthusiastic about your life

Social

- Maintaining healthy relationships, enjoying being with others, developing friendships and intimate relations, caring about others, and letting others care about you
- Contributing to your community

Spiritual

- Finding purpose, value, and meaning in your life with or without organized religion
- Participating in activities that are consistent with your beliefs and values

Occupational/Vocational

- Preparing for and participating in work that provides personal satisfaction and life enrichment that is consistent with your values, goals, and lifestyle
- Contributing your unique gifts, skills, and talents to work that is personally meaningful and rewarding

Environmental

- Understanding how your social, natural, and built environments affect your health and well-being
- Being aware of the unstable state of the earth and the effects of your daily habits on the physical environment
- Demonstrating commitment to a healthy planet

While building an awareness of our needs in our workplaces and engaging in self-care can help us intentionally incorporate wellness-affirming behaviours into our lives, there will also be times when experiences negatively impact our wellness. In the following sections we will explore signs of burnout and some common workplace stressors. There will also be opportunities for you to identify any specific stressors that you are navigating and self-care strategies that may support you.

Signs of Burnout

“Burnout... describe[s] the physical and emotional exhaustion that workers can experience when they have low job satisfaction and feel powerless and overwhelmed at work” (Mathieu, 2019).

The following signs of burnout have been identified by Bourq Carter (2013):

Chronic fatigue

- Physical and emotional exhaustion, feeling drained and depleted
- Dreading what lies ahead

Trouble with sleep and Insomnia

- Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or an inability to sleep

Forgetfulness/impaired concentration & attention

- Forgetting things, difficulty focusing, having things pile up

Physical symptoms and increased illness.

- Chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, fainting and headaches
- Gastrointestinal pain, loss of appetite or changes in weight
- Increased vulnerability to illness due to a weakened immune system

Mental health concerns

- Feeling anxious, depressed, tense, guilty, worried, worthless or trapped

Anger and irritability

- Often stems from feeling ineffective, inefficient, unimportant and useless
- Can interfere with personal and professional relationships

Loss of enjoyment

- May start with work but can extend to all areas of life
- Avoiding tasks or work altogether

Pessimism and feelings of apathy or hopelessness

- May include negative self-talk
- May extend to relationship issues and distrust with people at work
- Feeling you cannot count on anyone
- May feel like nothing is going right or nothing matters
- May sound like “what’s the point?”

Isolation and detachment

- Avoiding social and work situations
- Becoming angry when someone speaks to you
- Feeling disconnected from others and your environment

Lack of productivity and poor performance

- Feeling unproductive
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Changes in performance of work tasks

Workplace Stressors and Self-Care Strategies

The chart below provides examples of common workplace stressors and self-care strategies that may be supportive in navigating them. It has been organized to reflect the previously listed dimensions of wellness.

Dimension of Wellness	Possible Workplace Stressors	Self-Care Strategies
Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not taking breaks Working at an unsustainable pace Needing to work overtime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eating healthy² Physical exercise / movement² Engaging in proper sleep hygiene² Focusing on your breathing and slowing down your breathing rate² Getting physical rest³ Staying hydrated Being aware of and adjusting your posture/position
Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unsupportive workplace relationships Feeling uncomfortable asking for help Feeling uncomfortable expressing yourself freely and honestly Not feeling cared for, heard or valued Not setting boundaries that support a healthy work life Others' lack of respect for your boundaries Feelings of guilt Traumatic workplace event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting healthy personal and emotional boundaries² Keeping a sense of humour² Focusing on your daily accomplishments¹ Avoiding criticizing yourself unnecessarily,¹ Asking people who you trust for support¹ Shutting out disturbing images and messages in media¹ Increasing self-awareness through mindfulness meditation and narrative work (e.g., journaling)⁴ Writing daily in a gratitude journal¹ Getting emotional rest³ Being aware of the stories we tell ourselves and open to a different perspective Asking: Can we hold others in high regard?

		<p>Asking: Can we avoid taking on guilt and responsibility that is not ours?</p> <p>Using positive affirmations</p> <p>Being flexible in your approach to work</p>
Spiritual	Activities conflict with your values and beliefs	<p>Scheduling meaningful activities for yourself²</p> <p>Employing mindfulness², reflection, meditation or prayer¹</p> <p>Getting spiritual rest³</p>
Environmental	<p>Workspace is disorganized</p> <p>Workspace is stressful</p> <p>Workspace feels unsafe</p> <p>Unsupportive seating/lighting</p>	<p>Keeping your environment organized and tidy¹</p> <p>Posting a list of what is valued, enjoyable or precious in your life somewhere you will see it daily¹</p> <p>Getting sensory rest³</p> <p>Seeking stimulating or calming surroundings</p> <p>Creating a comfortable workstation</p> <p>Intentionally transitioning between work and home life</p> <p>Additional ideas for working from home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separating space for work and life when possible Shutting the door to your workspace or removing your work items from your space when your workday ends
Social	<p>Being disconnected from your colleagues</p> <p>Interpersonal commitments are not upheld</p>	<p>Developing and maintaining a strong social support both at home and at work⁴</p> <p>Becoming more involved and connected with your friends, family or community¹</p> <p>Connecting with people who care about you¹</p> <p>Getting social rest³</p> <p>Supporting a healthy work environment (e.g., being reliable, holding other in high regard)</p> <p>Building relationships and connection with colleagues</p>

Intellectual

Discomfort in saying “I don’t know”
Lack of learning and growth opportunities

Attending seminars and talks on mental health¹
Getting mental and creative rest³
Engaging with information and activities that interest you
Taking courses and completing certificates
Building skills relevant to your professional growth
Seeking meaningful coaching or mentorship
Listening to those with different expertise

Occupational

Unmanageable Workload
Unclear priorities
Having to take on other people’s workload
Lack of role clarity
Lack of autonomy
Poor communication with colleagues and supervisors regarding work tasks
Contributions not being recognized
Organizational commitments are not upheld
Disorganized workplace structure
Constant high-stress activities
Healthy work habits not being role modelled by colleagues and supervisors

Focusing on one thing at a time rather than multi-tasking¹
Working at a reasonable, steady pace¹
Breaking down tasks and projects into achievable steps¹
Recognizing and celebrating small steps along the way¹
Taking regular assigned breaks¹
Resisting unnecessary overtime¹
Disconnecting from work during vacation time as much as possible¹
Asking for help, delegating tasks or resetting priorities¹
Becoming comfortable saying “I don’t know” if needed
Seeking role clarity when needed
Diversifying the types of tasks you do in a day
Setting a reminder for the end of the workday
Communicating your needs to supervisors/colleagues
Changing your role or leaving your role
Attending communities of practice

¹ Baynton, M & Workplace Strategies team. (2021, February 26). Prevent burnout. Workplace Strategies for Mental Health.

² CAMH. Is there a cost to protecting, caring for and saving others? Beware of Compassion Fatigue.

³ DeBara, D. (2021). How to leverage the 7 types of rest to be your happiest, most productive self. Trello.

⁴ Mathieu, F. (2019). What is Compassion Fatigue. Tend Academy.

Supporting Your Wellness in the Workplace

The remainder of this document contains reflective exercises and tools intended to facilitate:

1. Reflection on how your workplace environment impacts you
2. Identification of indicators of your wellness and unwellness at work
3. Exploration of how you can respond if your needs are not being met
4. Reflection on how you can contribute to a healthier work environment
5. Discussion of wellness in workplaces with colleagues and members of leadership

Identifying and Communicating Your Needs

Reflect on and respond to the following prompts:

My knowledge, skills and strengths lend themselves well to the following work tasks or situations:

Click or tap here to enter text.

I feel best supported in my role when:

Click or tap here to enter text.

I have difficulty with:

Click or tap here to enter text.

I can ask for support from:

Click or tap here to enter text.

I can express what I need in the following ways:

- Example: Could you show me how to do this so that I am better able to do so independently going forward?
- I am experiencing a barrier in relation to:
 - Click or tap here to enter text.
- I need more information about:
 - Click or tap here to enter text.
- Could you clarify:
 - Click or tap here to enter text.
- I'd like to try:
 - Click or tap here to enter text.
- Could we explore:
 - Click or tap here to enter text.

Signs that indicate I am approaching burnout may include:

Click or tap here to enter text.

Supporting my Workplace Stressors

Complete the following table with any stressors and self-care strategies that are unique to you. Self-care strategies can be those that you already know to be supportive to your wellness needs or strategies that you would like to try out. You may wish to reference the table provided on pages 7-9 of this document.

Dimensions of Wellness	My Workplace Stressors	Self-Care Strategies
Physical	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Emotional	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Spiritual	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Environmental	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Social	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Intellectual	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Occupational	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

DEBORAH Goal Setting Model

The DEBORAH Goal Setting Model, created by the Centre for Innovation in Peer Support, may aid you in achieving workplace wellness goals. This model takes a holistic approach to exploring goals, considering both internal and external factors that may impact someone as they pursue change and personal meaning.

<https://supporhouse.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/DEBORAH-Goal-Setting-Model.pdf>

Is it Within my Control?

There will be times when we have varying degrees of control over the situations and experiences that impact us. It can be beneficial to reflect on the aspects of any given situation that are within our control, somewhat within our control, and outside of our control. This exercise can guide you through making decisions related to where you want to direct your efforts and focus.

A resource you may wish to review in support of this reflection can be found here: [Understanding What's Within Our Control: A Guide to Empowerment \(linkedin.com\)](#)



Situation:

Click or tap here to enter text.

What is within my control?

Click or tap here to enter text.

What is somewhat within my control?

Click or tap here to enter text.

What is outside of my control?

Click or tap here to enter text.

Supporting Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) (2024) offers the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard) to help employers and organizations create and maintain mentally healthy workplaces. This resource provides tools, information, and support to facilitate discussions of wellness in workplaces. To learn more about and review this resource, click [here](#).

The MHCC also offers resources meant to compliment and support the implementation of the Standard in workplaces. Included in those resources are 13 identified factors connected to being a mindful employee and contributing to a psychologically safe workplace. These factors have been included below for your review alongside ways that they can be put into action in workplaces. These can be used to guide your own reflection on ways that you can contribute to healthier workplaces.

The Thirteen Factors

Mental Health Commission of Canada (2024)

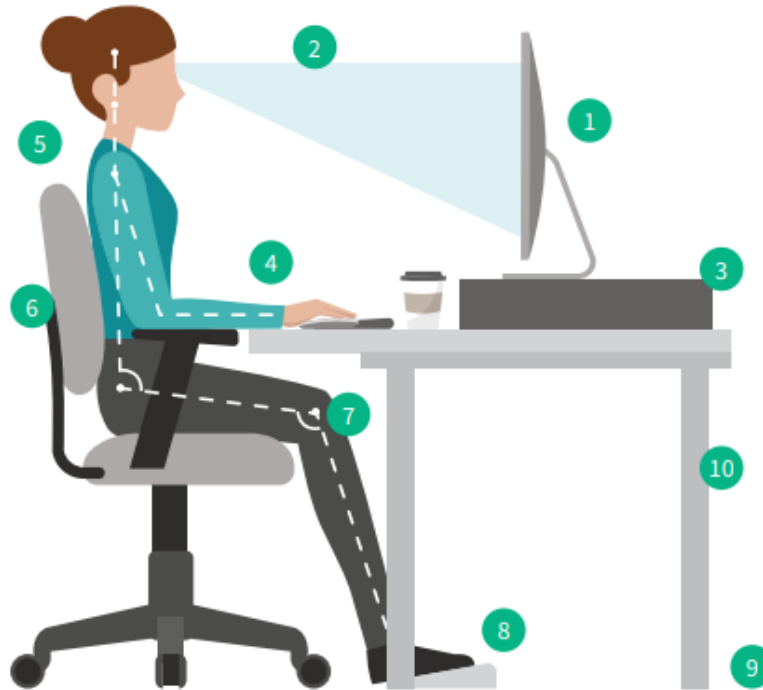
Factor	What can <u>you</u> do?
Balance	Engage in open communication with your supervisor, family and friends to help manage the balance between work and personal demands.
Civility & Respect	Show esteem, care and consideration. Respect the perspective of others. Acknowledge each person's dignity.
Clear Leadership & Expectations	Ensure you understand what is being asked of you by maintaining good two-way communication. Strive to clarify any issues that arise.
Engagement	Make a reasonable effort to get involved in events or activities taking place in your workplace.
Growth and Development	Be proactive and seek out opportunities to improve your skills and competence.
Involvement and Influence	Share your opinion when asked. Offer alternatives and solutions in a way that respects the ideas and opinions of others.
Organizational Culture	Try to be understanding of co-workers' concerns. Consider how your behaviour could impact the psychological health and safety of your colleagues.
Protection of Physical Safety	Ensure that management is made aware of any hazards.
Psychological and Social Support	If you notice someone is struggling, take time to approach them.
Psychological Demands	Make a list of demands that may require additional support and discuss with your supervisor. Seek out guidance from someone who has learned to manage similar demands.
Psychological Protection	Speak up when you witness violent, aggressive, or inappropriate behaviours or actions.
Recognition and Reward	Take the time to recognize and appreciate others for their efforts and contributions.
Workload Management	Create a workplace plan and discuss with your manager or supervisor.

Ergonomic Office Workstation Setup Checklist



Is your desk ergonomically set up?

Use our Workstation Setup Checklist to ensure that you're set up for success. Use the diagram to see what factors we consider when setting up your desk.



1. Monitor Height

Set the top of screen to eye level.

2. Monitor Distance

The monitor should be 18-36" from your eyes. Single monitors should be positioned closer, and dual monitors should be positioned farther.

3. Keyboard & Mouse

Keyboard and mouse are beside one another, at the same height, and close to the front edge of the work surface. The desk or keyboard tray is adjusted to your elbow height.

4. Desktop Arrangement

Frequently used items are positioned within an arm's reach of your seated position.

5. Shoulders

Shoulders are low and back. No reaching forward. Armrests are adjusted to your elbow height (elbows bent to 90 degrees)

6. Backrest

Backrest is adjusted to provide lumbar support in the lower back. Backrest angle is adjusted between 90 - 110 degrees.

7. Knees

Knees are bent at 90-120 degrees. There is 2-3" of space behind the knee and the front edge of the seat.

8. Feet

Feet are fully supported either on the floor or on a footrest.

9. Break

You have taken a microbreak in the last 30 minutes

10. Postural Break

You have taken a short walk around your work area within the last hour.

Workload Overview Template

This template includes some of the common elements of peer support roles. Every role will be unique to an organization’s needs. For this reason, it may be beneficial to complete this template alongside your job description and/or Supervisor.

Tasks	Weekly	Monthly
Meetings (Internal and External)	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Administration (Emails, planning, preparation)	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Direct Service (groups, one to one meetings, work on behalf of people engaging in services etc.)	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.
Total Hours:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Click or tap here to enter text.

Additional Resources to Explore

Professional Quality of Life Measure:

https://img1.wsimg.com/blobby/go/dfc1e1a0-a1db-4456-9391-18746725179b/downloads/ProQOL_5_English_Self-Score.pdf?ver=1622777390411

Resilience, Burnout & Meaning:

<https://www.tendacademy.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Resilience-Balance-Meaning-excerpt-Self-Care-Questionnaires-Dr.-Pat-Fisher-2016.pdf>

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