

CENTRE FOR INNOVATION IN PEER SUPPORT

Peer Support Hiring Guide Version 2

Support / **House**



1-833-845-WELL (9355) Ext 390
supporthouse.ca
centreinfo@supporthouse.ca

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Acknowledgements

Authors
<p>Ethan Hopkins, Peer Integration & Systems Support, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support Alyssa Gremmen, Peer Integration & Systems Lead, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support</p>
Content Advisor
Richard Adair , Manager, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support
Content Reviewer
Betty-Lou Kristy , Director, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support
Branding Coordinator
Lisa McVey , Communications & Marketing Coordinator, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support
Previous Versions
<p>Christina Jabalee, Associate Executive Director, Support House – Version 1 Betty-Lou Kristy, Director, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support – Version 1</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.

Key Considerations

Hiring Peer Support Workers should not be a different process from any other staff position at your organization.

- Ensure your organization has a strong understanding of peer support and the *Guiding Standards of Peer Support*.
 - Provide education on peer work to Board of Directors, Supervisors, Leadership teams and Staff Teams.
- Review and update your organization's policies and procedures that could be barriers to potential skilled candidates. (Example: Ability to hire those with past criminal convictions).
- Have a process to determine relevance and risk related to a past conviction
- Review and update your organization's policies and procedures that could be barriers for authentic peer work. (Example: sharing of lived experience).
- Ensure the salary range for the peer support worker is equitable. Consider the lived-expertise and skills a peer brings to your organization. Are they being compensated equal to other staff performing similar tasks and duties?
- Is there someone on the interview panel who is knowledgeable about the *Guiding Standards of Peer Support* and best practices? (Example: another peer support worker).
- When hiring a person previously or currently engaged with your organization's services ensure that...
 - There are confidentiality measures in place (Example: Only an active supporter has access to their file)
 - They do not report to their active supporter
 - There are clear policies & procedures regarding boundaries and dual relationships (Example: relationships with others engaging in services, relationship with colleague/supporter)

The Centre for Innovation in Peer Support has a webinar, *Understanding Peer Support* to support organizations in learning more about the peer support role.

Job Description Template

Nature of the Work

The Peer Support Worker is someone who has a similar life experience to/of [INSERT CONTEXT]. They have engaged in special training and skill development to use their experience and other skillsets to enhance their ability to support others. This is a non-clinical role.

Essential Duties

Supporting People Engaging with Services:

- Establish and maintain supportive relationships with people engaging with our services
- Act in accordance with the Guiding Standards of Peer Support (comprised of Mental Health Commission of Canada's *Values of Peer Support*, Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's *Peer Support Values in Action*, Peer Support Canada's *Code of Conduct, Principles of Practice & Core Competencies*)
- Support a person-directed care philosophy
- Share lived/living experiences with people engaged with our services when this is of service to them
- Encourage people engaging with our services and support them in their wellness goals
- Advocate with and, if necessary for, people engaging with our services
- Act as a role model in demonstrating the ways you support yourself
- Provide reassurance and support when there are experiences of crisis or distress
- Support the exploration of choices and options with people engaging with our services
- Support navigation of the health and social services systems, including making referrals to other supports when identified by the people engaging with our services
- Support inbound referrals and intake processes
- [ADD] Any other role specific requirements (Examples: facilitate groups, provide one-to-one support, support court appearances, etc)

Community Partnerships:

- Maintain knowledge on local community resources and learning opportunities
- Foster relationships with community partners
- Promote and facilitate education and awareness of our services

Working as Part of a Team:

- Work collaboratively with team members
- Participate in team meetings, agency events and committees
- Attend regular supervision
- Support program planning, evaluation and reporting

Other Duties

- Complete any administration and documentation tasks
- Abide by all legal requirements as well as agency policy, procedure and practices

Essential Knowledge, Experience & Training

Applicants should have completed a formal peer support training and possess experience related to the practice of peer support. Additional assets may include previous experience as a Peer Supporter in a staff, volunteer, or intern capacity.

Knowledge and Training on the *Guiding Standards of Peer Support*:

- Mental Health Commission of Canada's *Values of Peer Support*,
- Centre for Innovation in Peer Support's *Peer Support Values in Action*,
- Peer Support Canada's *Code of Conduct, Principles of Practice & Core Competencies*

Understanding of Recovery and Wellness

- Proficient knowledge of how to apply Person-Centred and/or Person-Directed Care approaches
- Knowledge and training on trauma-informed care practices
- Knowledge that recovery and wellness are unique and holistic in nature
- Awareness of how to support harm reduction

Self-Awareness

- Awareness and training of how to examine your biases and support in a way that is anti-oppressive and inclusive

Crisis

- Training in supporting people experiencing distress and crisis
- Training in assessing safety
- Knowledge of confidentiality, Duty to Protect and Duty to Report

Other Assets:

- Wellness Recovery Action Plan (Level 1 and 2)
- Brief Action Planning
- First Aid and CPR
- Group Facilitation training
- LivingWorks trainings: SafeTALK, ASIST, Suicide2Hope
- Mental Health First Aid

Essential Skills & Abilities

- Ability to assess how and when to skillfully use selective disclosure (sharing your story)
- Proficient in setting and maintaining boundaries
- Effective conflict resolution skills
- Strong communication skills
- Ability to effectively work as part of a team
- Ability to take initiative
- Ability to be flexible/adaptable
- Ability to engage in reflective practice and seek out ongoing learning
- Excellent problem-solving ability
- Effective time management and organization skills
- Proficient in the use of [INSERT APPLICABLE SOFTWARE]
- Proficient in the use of [INSERT APPLICABLE VIRTUAL PLATFORM(S)]

Peer Work Interview Question Examples

General Questions

Question	What can you draw on from your own professional and personal life experiences that would support you in this role?
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant lived-experience to the support they would be providing in this role • Relevant qualifications (training, education, volunteering, internships, etc)

Question	<p>What is your understanding of... (select relevant topic below)?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Person-Centred and/or Person-Directed Care approaches 2. Trauma-informed care practices 3. Holistic recovery and wellness 4. Harm reduction 5. Other role-specific area of focus
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proficient knowledge and understanding of chosen topic

Question	How would you explain the role of a peer support worker to someone who's never heard of it?
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mention of the Values of Peer Support (Self-determination; health & wellness; hope & recovery; equal & empathetic relationships; integrity, authenticity & trust; dignity, respect & social inclusion; lifelong learning & personal growth) • Actions that align with above values • A relationship directed by persons engaging in services • Sharing of lived/living experience to support others' wellness

Question	Can you tell us why it is important to form relationships with other service providers both within this organization and with other organizations in the community?
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports wrap-around-care • The person engaging with services may identify needing another type of service provider (self-determination) • Teamwork

Scenario Questions

Question	How would you provide peer support to someone who has very different beliefs and values from your own?
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting in accordance with the Values of Peer Support (Self-determination; health & wellness; hope & recovery; equal & empathetic relationships; integrity, authenticity & trust; dignity, respect & social inclusion; lifelong learning & personal growth) • Demonstrates self-awareness and an understanding of anti-oppressive practice • May discuss how they would professionally navigate a conversation regarding the scope of their role or their boundaries
Question	<p>How would you use your lived experiences to support someone experiencing loneliness?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>Provide an example of how you've used your lived experience to support someone else.</p>
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflects self-determination (Is not presented as how they "fixed" or would "fix" a person's situation, but rather how they would support the person) • Shares lived experience from a place of resilience, inspiring hope, focused on the impact of their lived experiences, the learnings they've had, the actions they took and supports they found helpful (if applicable).
Question	<p>Tell us how you would support a peer in advocating for their needs with their doctor.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>A peer tells you they no longer want to meet with another staff person on your team, how would you support this situation?</p>
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tangible examples of how they would support self-advocacy and communication with service providers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Examples may include, but are not limited to: exploring communication strategies, role playing, preparing notes and/or questions with the peer, researching relevant info with the peer, providing encouragement

Question	A peer says “I wish I wasn’t here anymore,” how would you support them?
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledges that it begins with a conversation to further explore the person’s feelings and needs • Explore if there are any risks of serious harm • Acknowledges that if needed they would collaboratively have a safety conversation, or create a wellness plan • Honouring respect, dignity • Honouring self-determination whenever possible • Genuinely listening, providing validation & staying out of judgement • Acknowledges reviewing or referencing of following any agency policies and procedures & legal requirements • May discuss offering their lived experience perspective

Question	A peer asks you about a service or medication you have personally had negative experiences with, how would you respond?
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledges the importance of neutrality, does not disclose details of personal negative experience or opinion (They may share generally, “I have had negative experiences with medication before, I... [supportive actions taken]”) • Acknowledges that everyone’s experience with medication is unique • Explores options open to the person and what they can do to gain further knowledge

Question	A peer you support asks you a personal question you are not comfortable answering, how would you respond?
Looking for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates an ability to comfortably communicate boundaries

Hiring People Connected to Their Experiences

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. **It is important that while interviewing job candidates, we listen to ensure people are connected to their experiences.**

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. Peer support workers' experiences make up a large amount of their expertise. When peer support workers are connected to their experiences, this expertise can lead to supportive relationships with themselves, others and systems to create positive change. When used ineffectively, peer support workers can do harm to themselves and others, and create minimal change.

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).

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").

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 that 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 in regard to services, policies and best practices, raise awareness of peer support and advocate 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.

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)
- ***Understanding Peer Support: A Proposed Core Service in Ontario***
- ***Peer Support Implementation Toolkit***

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

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