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Core Competencies for Peer Workers in Behavioral Health Services

Feedback Deadline: May 5, 2015

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) through the Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale Technical Assistance Center (BRSS TACS) has developed a draft set of core competencies for Peer Workers in Behavioral Health settings. SAMHSA would like to give the public an opportunity to provide feedback and make comments on the competencies. Please review the competencies and provide your comments as appropriate. SAMHSA has also included a general comment box for overall comments on the proposed core competencies.

Read SAMHSA's Frequently Asked Questions About The Core Competencies (http://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs/core-competencies-peer-workers-behavioral-health-services/frequently-asked-questions)

Thank you for taking the time to review and comment.

Core Competencies for Peer Workers in Behavioral Health Services

Category I: Engages peers in collaborative and caring relationships
This category of competencies emphasized peer workers' ability to initiate and develop on-going relationships with people who have behavioral health condition and/or family members. These competencies include interpersonal skills, knowledge about recovery from behavioral health conditions and attitudes consistent with a recovery orientation.
1. Initiates contact with peers
2. Listens to peers with careful attention to the content and emotion being communicated
3. Reaches out to engage peers across the whole continuum of the recovery process
4. Demonstrates genuine acceptance and respect
5. Demonstrates understanding of peers' experiences and feelings.
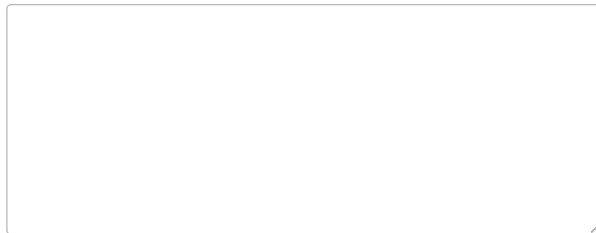
Category II: Provides support
The competencies in this category are critical for the peer worker to be able to provide the emotional, informational, instrumental, and affiliation support people living with behavioral health conditions may want.
6. Validates peers' experiences and feelings
7. Encourages the exploration and pursuit of community roles
8. Conveys hope to peers about their own recovery
9. Celebrates peers' efforts and accomplishments
10. Provides concrete assistance to help peers accomplish tasks and goals.

Category III: Shares lived experiences of recovery

These competencies are unique to peer support, as most roles in behavioral health services do not emphasize or even prohibit the sharing of lived experiences. Peer workers need to be skillful in telling their recovery stories and using their lived experiences as a way of inspiring and supporting a person living with behavioral health conditions. Family peer support worker likewise share their personal experiences of self-care and supporting a family-member who is living with behavioral health conditions.
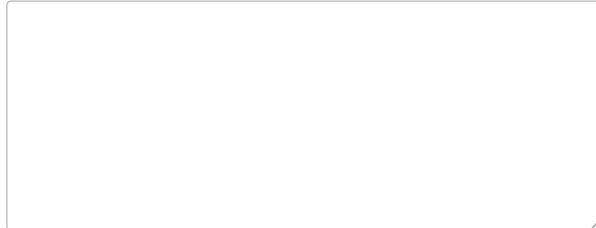
11. Relates their own and others' personal recovery stories to peers to inspire hope
12. Discusses ongoing personal efforts to enhance health, wellness, and recovery
13. Recognizes when to share experiences and when to listen
14. Describes personal recovery practices and helps peers discover recovery practices that work for them.

Category IV: Personalizes peer support

These competencies help peer workers to tailor or individualize the support services provided to and with a peer. By personalizing peer support, the peer worker operationalizes the notion that there are multiple pathways to recovery.
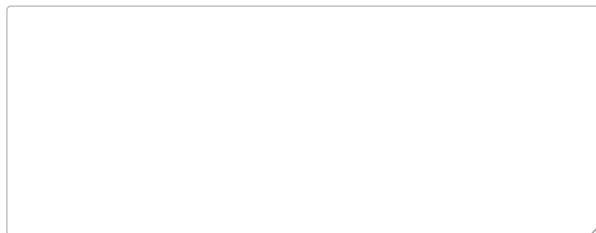
15. Understands his/her own personal values and culture and how these may contribute to biases, judgments and beliefs
16. Appreciates and respects the cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices of peers and their families
17. Recognizes and responds to the complexities and uniqueness of each peer's process of recovery
18. Tailors services and support to meet the preferences and unique needs of peers and their families.

Category V: Recovery planning

These competencies enable peer workers to support other peers to take charge of their lives. Recovery often leads people to want to make changes in their lives. Recovery planning assists people to set and accomplish goals related to home, work, community and health.
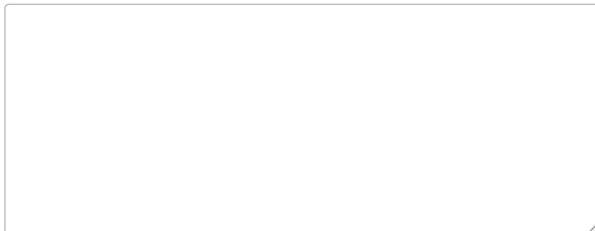
19. Assists and supports peers to set goals and to dream of future possibilities
20. Proposes strategies to help a peer accomplish tasks or goals
21. Supports peers to use decision-making strategies when choosing services and supports
22. Helps peers to function as a member of their treatment/recovery support team
23. Researches and identifies credible information and options on the Internet an through other resources.

Category VI: Links to resources, services, and supports

These competencies assist peer workers to help other peers acquire the resources, services, and supports they need to enhance their recovery. Peer workers apply these competencies to assist other peers to link to resources or services both within and outside of formal behavioral health services. It is critical that peer workers have knowledge of resources within their communities as well as on-line resources.
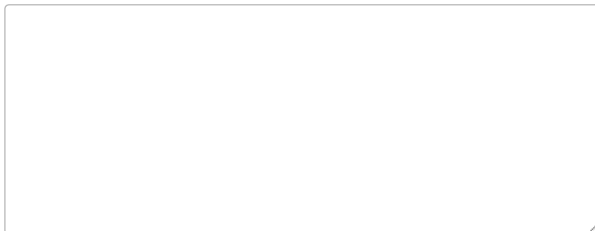
24. Develops and maintains up-to-date information about community resources and services, both indigenous and formal
25. Assists peers to investigate, select, and use needed and desired resources and services, both indigenous and formal
26. Helps peers to find and use health services and support
27. Accompanies peers to community activities and appointments; 28. Participates in community activities with peers.

Category VII: Teaches information and skills related to health, wellness, and recovery

These competencies describe how peer workers coach, model or teach information or behaviors that enhance recovery. These competencies recognize that peer workers have knowledge, skills and experiences to offer others in recovery and that the recovery process often involves learning and growth.
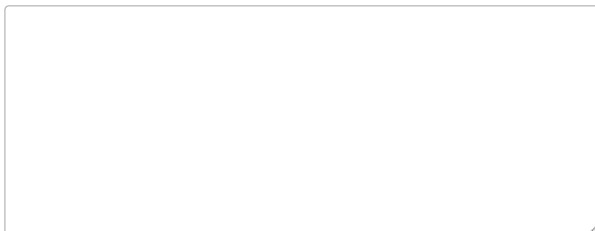
29. Educates peers about health, wellness, recovery and recovery supports
30. Participates with peers in discovery or co-learning to enhance recovery experiences
31. Coaches peers about how to access services and navigate systems of services
32. Coaches peers in desired skills and strategies
33. Educates family members and other supportive individuals about recovery and recovery supports
34. Uses teaching strategies that match the preferences and needs of individual peers.

Category VIII: Helps peers to manage crises

These competencies assist peer workers to identify potential risks and to use procedures that reduce risks to peers and others. Peer workers may have to manage situations, in which there is intense distress and work to ensure the safety and well-being of other peers.
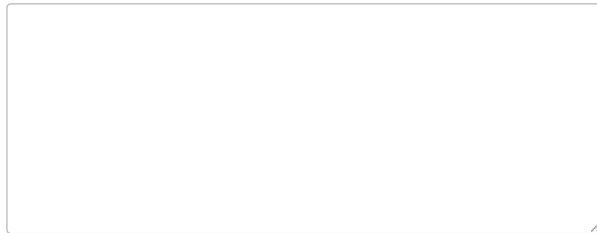
35. Recognizes signs of distress and threats to safety among peers and in their environments
36. Provides reassurance to peers in distress
37. Strives to create safe spaces when meeting with peers
38. Takes action to address distress or a crisis by using knowledge of local resources and service and support preferences of individual peers
39. Assists peers in developing advance directives and other crisis prevention tools.
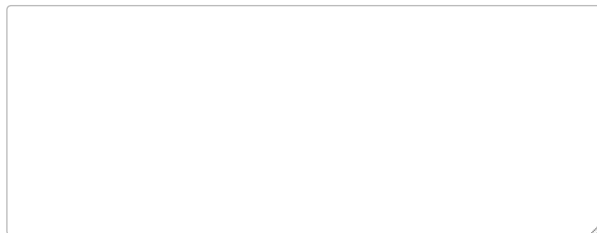
Category IX-Communication

These competencies provide guidance on how peer workers interact verbally and in writing with colleagues and others. These competencies suggest language and processes used to communicate and operationalize the value of respect.

39. Uses respectful, person-centered, recovery-oriented language in written and verbal interactions with peers, family members, community members, and others:

40. Uses active listening skills

41. Clarifies their understanding of information when in doubt of the meaning

42. Conveys their point of view when working with colleagues

43. Documents information as required by program policies and procedures

44. Follows laws and rules concerning confidentiality and respects others' rights for privacy.

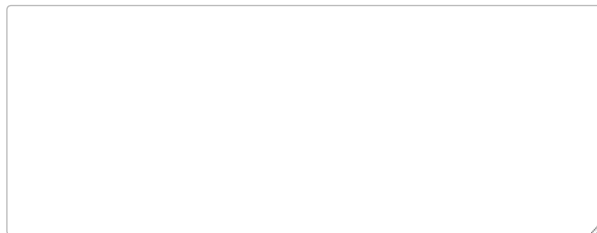**Category X: Collaboration and teamwork**

These competencies provide direction on how peer workers can develop and maintain effective relationships with colleagues and others to enhance the peer support provided. These competencies involve not only interpersonal skills but also organization skills.

45. Works together with other colleagues to enhance the provision of services and supports

46. Assertively engages providers from mental health services, addiction services, and physical medicine to meet the needs of peers

47. Coordinates efforts with health care providers to enhance the health and wellness of peers

48. Coordinates efforts with peers' family members and other natural supports

49. Partners with community members and organizations to strengthen opportunities for peers

50. Strives to resolve conflicts in relationships with peers and others in their support network.

Category XI: Leadership and advocacy

These competencies describe actions that peer workers use to provide leadership within behavioral health programs to advance a recovery-oriented mission of the services. They also guide to peer workers to advocate for the legal and human rights of other peers.

51.Uses knowledge of relevant rights and laws (ADA, HIPAA, Olmstead, etc.) to ensure that peer's rights are respected

52. Advocates for the needs and desires of peers in treatment team meetings, community services, living situations, and with family

53. Uses knowledge of legal resources and advocacy organization to build an advocacy plan

54. Participates in efforts to eliminate prejudice and discrimination of people who have behavioral health conditions and their families

55. Educations colleagues about the process of recovery and the use of recovery support services

56. Actively participates in efforts to improve the organization

57. Maintains a positive reputation in peer/professional communities.

Category XII: Growth and development

These competencies describe how peer workers become more reflective and competent in their practice. The competencies recommend specific actions that may serve to increase peer workers' success and satisfaction in their current roles and contribute to career advancement.

58. Recognizes the limits of their knowledge and seeks assistance from others when needed

59. Uses supervision (mentoring, reflection) effectively by monitoring self and relationships, preparing for meetings and engaging in problem-solving strategies with the supervisor (mentor, peer)

60. Reflects and examines own personal motivations, judgments, and feelings that may be activated by the peer work, recognizing signs of distress, and knowing when to seek support

61. Seeks opportunities to increase knowledge and skills of peer support.

Please use the box below to provide any additional overall feedback on the Core Competencies.

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